Art, Empathy, Truth

On The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience by Mikel Dufrenne

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Abstract

This thesis discusses Mikel Dufrenne's view presented in *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience* (1953) that the aesthetic experience is a fundamental aspect of human existence, which is valuable in its own right because it conveys truth. According to Dufrenne the aesthetic experience is the reading of, and contemplation on, the expressed meaning of an aesthetic object. The expressed meaning is purely sensuous and its comprehension is bodily. In the thesis I pose three questions to this view. First, if the aesthetic experience is a bodily comprehension of sensuous expression, what separates it from empathy? Second, if it is said that the expressed meaning of the aesthetic object is true, what is aesthetic truth? Third, if it is held that the aesthetic experience is fundamental, and thus necessary and universal, how does it relate to its socio-cultural context?

Briefly put, I argue that the major difference between aesthetic and empathic experience, is that aesthetic experience conveys truth. According to Dufrenne, truth is a meaning that illuminates the real. The expressed meaning of the aesthetic object is such an illumination, and it can be described as being structured by an a priori principle. Therefore, the expression of the aesthetic object is not a result of the spectator's projection, but is an aspect of the aesthetic object itself. However, I argue that even though the aesthetic experience always occurs within a socio-cultural context, it can nevertheless not be reduced to be a product of this context alone. Finally, I present three contemporary approaches to aesthetic meaning, and discuss their merits in light of Dufrenne's theory, and briefly propose how it can be relevant for further interdisciplinary work between art history, theory and philosophical aesthetics.

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On *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience* by Mikel Dufrenne[1]

0.1. Introduction

In a short article in *October* Hal Foster argues that critical art and critical theory has lost its foothold among both academics and artists alike. Through his examination of what went wrong, and what possible options the future holds, he touches on contemporary artists who "in good Minimalist fashion…promote phenomenological experience."[2] According to Foster, they make "fetishist" art and "take thoughts and feelings, process them as images and effects and deliver them back to us for our appreciative amazement."[3] Named quasi-subjects with wants and desires we understand that, for Foster, such works of art have little or none potential to do any good, as critical art and theory should provoke "engaged citizenry."[4] However, as phenomenology is the name of a philosophical approach or method for describing a phenomenon, and not a distinct kind of experience, I am left wondering what Foster actually means by *phenomenological experience*? Whether he aims at art that examines phenomenologicaly conceptions of perception, or rather some sort of aesthetic experience is to me unclear. What *is* clear is that Foster tend to deny the importance of visuality and sensuousness in art on behalf of its political and social aspects. Such a tendency "to reduce all questions of meaning to issues of socio-historical contexts of production and reception"[5] Paul Crowther calls reductionism.[6] According to Crowther, the problem with reductionism is that it fails to address the irreducible form of sensuous meaning that is conveyed in art. Throughout the history of aesthetics there have been many attempts to describe this form of meaning. One of these attempts is Mikel Dufrenne's *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience* from 1953.[7]

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[1] Mikel Dufrenne (1910-1995) was Professor of Philosophy at The University of Nanterre, Paris X. There, he co-founded the department of philosophy with Paul Ricoeur and Emanuel Levinas. He was educated at l'École Normale Supérieure a few years after Jean Paul Sartre, while Maurice Merleau-Ponty was his senior classmate. He was president of the French Society of Aesthetics from 1971 to 1994. *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience* [*Phénoménologie de l'expérience esthétique*] was originally presented as his doctoral thesis at the Sorbonne in 1953. My edition is in the translation of Edward S. Casey from 1973. "Biographie et bibliographie de Mikel Dufrenne," in *La Reveue d'Esthetique,* Vol. 30, 193-194, (Paris: JMP, 1997).
[2] Hal Foster, "Post-Critical" in *October*, No. 139, Winter 2012, (New Work: MIT Press, 2012), 7.
[3] Foster, "Post-Critical," 7.
[4] Ibid., 3.
[5] Paul Crowther, *Phenomenology of the Visual Arts (even the frame)*, (California: Stanford University Press, 2009), 12.
[6] Paul Crowther (1953-) is Professor of Philosophy at the National University of Ireland, Galway.
[7] From now on called *The Phenomenology.*

0.1.1. Research Question

In *The Phenomenology* Mikel Dufrenne argues that the aesthetic experience is the reading of, and contemplation on, the expressed world of an aesthetic object. The expressed meaning is purely sensuous and its comprehension is bodily. In this thesis I will explore Dufrenne's view that the aesthetic experience is a fundamental aspect of human existence, which is valuable in its own right because it conveys truth. I will do this through a critical discussion of three possible questions to this view. First, if the aesthetic experience is a bodily comprehension of sensuous expression, what separates it from empathy? Second, if it is said that the expressed meaning of the aesthetic object is true, what is aesthetic truth? Third, if it is held that aesthetic experience is fundamental, and thus necessary and universal, how does it relate to its socio-cultural context?

Many other questions could have been posed, and it will be obvious for the reader that my discussions are highly sympathetic towards Dufrenne's theory, even though I will provide a few critical remarks. The reason for devoting this thesis to Dufrenne's work is threefold. First, the thesis was initiated by the immense question "why is art important?" Upon reading Dufrenne, I found that he gives a plausible answer to this question. Art is important because it is true. This statement, which might be somewhat unfashionable, intrigued me, and in this sense, the major guiding question for my work turned into "*how* is art important?" The three questions above are selected for this reason.

Second, upon searching for material on Dufrenne's work, I found that even though he was regarded as one of the most important French philosophers of aesthetics of his life time, little research has been done on his work (see 0.1.3). His work has arguably been in the shadow of such major figures as Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger, who's work in my view does not compromise anything like the systematic insights on the aesthetic experience which Dufrenne provides, however valuable they otherwise might be. In this sense, the thesis seeks to show Dufrenne's important contribution to the understanding of aesthetic experience.

Third, even though one of the trends in contemporary aesthetics[8] is a turn back to Baumgarten's conception of aesthetics as "the science of the sensible knowledge,"[9] a co-current tendency is the reductionist approach, mentioned above. A goal of this thesis is to show that art history, art theory and philosophical aesthetics may, or rather must, learn from

[8] According to Richard Shusterman, "Back to the Future: Aesthetics Today", in *Nordic Journal of Aesthetics*, No. 43, 104-122, (Stockholm: Thales, 2012).
[9] Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, "Fra *Aesthetica* (1750)," in *Estetisk Teori: En Antologi*, Kjersti Bale and Arnfinn Bø-Rygg (Ed.), 11-16, (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2008), 11. My translation.

each discipline through interdisciplinary work if we want to comprehend and fully appreciate the importance art has for man. In other words, it is my view that any form of reductionism, be it social, semiotic, phenomenological, psychological or biological, should be avoided. However, I will argue that Dufrenne's theory may provide one of the possible philosophical starting points for such interdisciplinary work. If we suppose that art may be true, further research might explore the various structural features, the social and historical contexts, and psychological or biological explanations, of that which may enable such an enigmatic and strange aspect of what most often is simply a human made object.

0.1.2. Overview of the thesis

This introduction also includes, in addition to the research question, overview, theoretical approach and research history, a general introduction to Dufrenne's project in *The Phenomenology.* Furthermore, I've chosen to include a basic introduction to phenomenological method in so far as it is a necessary framework for understanding Dufrenne's theory. As there hardly exist a thorough reading of the entire *The Phenomenology*, I will use the first chapter of the thesis as an opportunity to present the theory in some length.[10] In chapter two I will discuss the relation between aesthetics and empathy, using Max Scheler's and Simon Baron-Cohen's understandings of empathy as examples of understandings of non-conceptual expression. I will claim that a major difference is that aesthetic experience, according to Dufrenne's theory, lays claim to truth. In chapter three I will discuss Dufrenne's and Heidegger's understanding of the concept of truth, and how they relate truth to art. The main conclusion here is that Dufrenne holds that the expressed meaning of the artwork is true insofar as it illuminates the real, while Heidegger holds that truth

[10] Apart from Edward Casey's "Translator's Foreword" in Mikel Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience,* xv-xliv, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973) the most thorough, although short, introduction to Dufrenne's thesis is Hugh Silverman, "Review of Mikel Dufrenne's *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience,*" in *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism,* No. 33, Summer 1975, 462-464, (New Jersey: Wiley, 1975). Other brief but somewhat incomplete readings available include Edward S. Casey, "Mikel Dufrenne (1910–1995)," in *Handbook of Phenomenological Aesthetics*, Hans Rainer Sepp and Lester Embree (Ed.), 81-84, (Dodrecht: Springer, 2010). Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement: A Historical Introduction*. 3rd revised and enlarged ed., (The Hague: Marinus Nojhoff Publishers, 1982), 600-606. Randolph Mark Feezell, *Mikel Dufrenne and the Ontological Question in Art: A Critical Study of The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience,* Ph.D. Dissertation, (Buffalo: SUNY, 1977). An overview of texts on Dufrenne as of 1990 can be found in Mikel Dufrenne, *In the Presence of the Sensuous: Essays in Aesthetics,* (New York: Humanity Books, 1987), 205-207. A brief treatment of Dufrenne in Norwegian can be found in Peder Chr. Kjerschow, "Den eksemplariske musikken - Fenomenologisk lys over kunst og kunstopplevelse med særlig vekt på musikken," in *Studia Musicologica Norvegica*, Vol. 33, 102-115, (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2007). For further research history see 0.1.4.

happens in the work of art through a struggle between the intelligible and the unintelligible aspects of the work.

In the fourth chapter I will return to and further explain Crowther's concept of reductionism mentioned introductory. I will exemplify the term by some arguments from Foster's article "Post-Critical." By drawing upon the conclusions of chapter two and three, I will argue that Dufrenne's theory describes a fundamental structure of meaning that cannot be reduced to (although always occurring within) the social and historical context of its occurrence. In the fifth and final chapter, I will end the thesis by discussing Dufrenne's theory and three recent approaches to the experience of art that addresses the sensuous significance of the work, by Mitchell Green, Martin Seel and Paul Crowther.

0.1.3. Theoretical approach and some delimitations

This thesis is based on readings of texts, and critical discussions based on insights from these readings. I will not provide analyses of particular works of art, nor use specific examples. This choice is made both for reasons of style and for spatial concerns. The choice might be controversial, as Dufrenne himself has an extensive use of examples, ranging all the fine arts, in *The Phenomenology*. And moreover, some readers might prefer examples for clarifying the somewhat abstract theories. However, it must be emphasized that I will make repeated references to the terms 'work of art' and 'aesthetic object' (the distinction will be made clear in 1.1.) both of which always, if not otherwise stated, will refer to 'a painting' in this thesis. In my view, the text will provide sufficient clarity for comprehending the theories at hand, and examples are taken to be unnecessary.

To repeat, the art form treated in this thesis is painting, while Dufrenne treats all the fine arts, from painting to opera. This means that every aspect of Dufrenne's theory that is not relevant for the aesthetic experience of *paintings* will be omitted. Some further delimitations of my reading of *The Phenomenology* will be presented in 1.0.

In addition to Dufrenne's theory, I will present relevant parts of the work of several other philosophers and theoreticians. In chapter two, Scheler's and Baron-Cohen's theories on empathy are used. The former is arguably the most important writer on this theme from the phenomenological tradition while Baron-Cohen is a leading contemporary psychiatrist who has written extensively on empathy. In chapter three, I've chosen Heidegger as his work explicitly engages with the questions of art and truth while keeping within a phenomenological tradition. In chapter four, Foster is used as an example of an art theoretical

approach that I will, following Crowther, argue is reductionist. Foster is chosen as he is explicitly critical of the affective dimension of the aesthetic object, which we will see is central to Dufrenne. Crowther is chosen as he provides what in my view is an accurate critique of the reductionist tendencies in some recent art history and theory. In chapter five, however, I will briefly address Crowther's own theory as an example of a contemporary approach to aesthetic significance, as he addresses this from a phenomenological inspired position. The choice of Green's work might be more surprising as there are several more prominent philosophers from the analytic traditions who deal with the question of meaning in art (such as Peter Kivy and Stephen Davies). Green however, engages explicitly with the question of aesthetics and empathy, which is one of the main concerns in this thesis. For that reason I've chosen to include a brief discussion of his article. I've chosen Seel as an example of the current trend of the expanded notion of aesthetics inspired by Baumgarten, mentioned in 0.1.1.

0.1.4. Research history

Even though *The Phenomenology* is held as the most important work in phenomenological aesthetics, I have found little existing research on Dufrenne's work.[11] His work is often mentioned in literature on phenomenological aesthetics (see footnote 10), but I have found few works that explicitly engage with his philosophy. A notable exception includes the Ph.D. dissertation of Randolph Mark Feezell (1977) mentioned above. Other Ph.D. dissertations on Dufrenne include Claire Gagnon (University of Montreal, 1962), David G. Allen (University of Iowa, 1976), V. Lamb (University of Warwick, 1976), Richard Allan Berg (Purdue University, 1978), Joan Catherine Whitman (American University, 1982) and Ian McMackon (University of Ottawa, 1990).[12] Moreover there seems to be a recent interest in Dufrenne in China, such as Liao Yo Sheng's Ph.D. dissertation (Inner Mongolia Normal University, 2010), and several master theses, especially from Inner Mongolia Normal University. Several Chinese journals (such as *Journal of Jiangsu Institute of Education*, *Oriental Forum* and *Journal of Mianyang Normal University*) have published articles on Dufrenne by, amongst others Zhang Yun-peng Hu Yi-shan (2007), Liu Chao (2007) and Tao Yi (2007). However,

[11] *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience* is held as one of the two major works in phenomenological aesthetics, the other being Roman Ingarden's *The Literary Work of Art* from 1931 according to the American aesthetician Monroe Beardsley who writes that it is one of the two "outstanding works in phenomenological aesthetics," Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present,* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 371. The historian Herbert Spiegelberg writes that it is "easily the most comprehensive work of the Phenomenological Movement in esthetics [sic] thus far." Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement,* 600.
[12] See the list of literature for full source on all Ph.D. dissertations and articles.

judging by titles and the abstracts available, none of these works have the same approach to Dufrenne as I do in this thesis. Except the brief article by Kjerschow (see footnote 10), I have not found any mention of Dufrenne in Scandinavian academics at all. This is of course no comprehensive list of all work that is done on Dufrenne's theory. I am nevertheless quite sure to conclude that no existing research examines Dufrenne's theory from the point of view such as this thesis.

Other contemporary approaches to aesthetics and empathy includes Dominic McIver Lopes' "An Empathic Eye," which addresses the same discussion as we will see in Green, and Suzan Keen's *Empathy and The Novel*, which addresses empathy in the context of the literary arts. Concerning art and truth, Herman Rapaport's *Is There Truth In Art?* provides interesting insights.

0.2. Mikel Dufrenne's project in *The Phenomenology*

Before we turn to Dufrenne's theory proper, it is important to have a good understanding of the aim and scope of *The Phenomenology*. Dufrenne writes,

> The aesthetic experience which we wish to describe, in order to engage afterward in its transcendental analysis and bring out its metaphysical meaning, is the experience of the spectator and not the artist himself.[13]

The project in *The Phenomenology* is in other words, primarily to describe the aesthetic experience of the spectator and not the creator of the work of art.[14] This relates also to Dufrenne's methodological choice of treating the aesthetic experience of art works as an "an exemplary one, free of the impurities sometimes imported into the perception of an aesthetic object stemming from the world of nature."[15] I do not interpret this as a denial of the importance of a thorough understanding of the aesthetics of other spheres of human life. I see it rather as a necessary delimitation of Dufrenne's work.[16]

But what does he mean by works of art? Dufrenne does not discuss this at length; he simply decides to rely on tradition. From this we understand that any work of art *that promotes aesthetic experience* may be put under consideration. It may be tempting to criticize

[13] Mikel Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology*, E. S. Casey, (Trans.), assisted by A.A. Anderson, W. Domingo and L. Jacobson, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), xlv.
[14] In a later essay he proposes a theory of the aesthetic experience of the artist, which is correlative to the theory presented in *The Phenomenology.* See "Painting, Forever" in Mikel Dufrenne, *In the Presence of the Sensuous,* 139-155.
[15] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology,* li.
[16] In fact, Dufrenne treats the question on aesthetics and nature both briefly in *The Phenomenology* (see 84-92) and in several later works. See for instance "The Aesthetic Experience of Nature" in Mikel Dufrenne, *Esthetique et philosophie,* 38-61, (Paris: Klincksieck, 1967). And Mikel Dufrenne, *Le Poétique,* (Paris: PUF, 1963).

Dufrenne for this choice, but I think we should remember that the aim of his theory is to describe aesthetic experience, not the ontology of the work of art. Thus, an ontological treatment of the work of art falls out of the scope of Dufrenne's thesis. But is not the decision to rely on tradition circular in argumentation? Yes, but again, it is not Dufrenne's aim to give a valid definition of the work of art either. Rather, I think Dufrenne would like to show (although he never says so explicitly) that aesthetic experience is common to any man in any culture and historical period, despite the fact that the works of art differ, a point we will return to in chapter four. This is to say that I interpret Dufrenne's description of the aesthetic experience as exhibiting the fundamental structure of the aesthetic experience, which must be found in *any* aesthetic experience, in order for it to be an aesthetic experience at all. In other words, the aesthetic experience must be necessary and universal. This is of course the very aim of the phenomenological method, as we shall see further down. Therefore, it is beyond the scope of Dufrenne's thesis to treat the question of aesthetic *judgments* and other normative statements (see also 1.4).

Nevertheless, the quote above demands some more attention. For what does Dufrenne mean by *describing, transcendental analysis* and *metaphysical meaning*? *The Phenomenology* was originally published in two separate volumes, *The Aesthetic Object* and *The Aesthetic Perception*. Although this indicates a fundamental sub-division of the book in two parts, translator Edward Casey argues that it is beneficial to understand the book in three parts: the aesthetic object, the aesthetic perception and the reconciliation of the two.[17] Dufrenne states that "we shall pass from the phenomenological to the transcendental, and the transcendental will itself flow into the metaphysical."[18] In other words, the description of the aesthetic experience is not any kind of description, but a *phenomenological* description, which I will explain further in 0.3. The description treats the two components of the aesthetic experience separately, namely the aesthetic object and the aesthetic perception. The transcendental analysis is then the analysis of the condition of possibility for such an experience. This part is largely influenced by Immanuel Kant, who in his *Critique of Pure Reason* of 1781 sought to understand the conditions of possibility of the transcendental forms of intuition and the categories of reason. In part IV of *The Phenomenology*, symptomatically called "Critique of Aesthetic Experience," Dufrenne launches the term *affective a priori* as the reconciliation of aesthetic object and perception. Although Kant stated that a priori knowledge is "knowledge

[17] Casey, "Translator's Foreword," xxii.
[18] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology*, lxvi.

that is absolutely independent of all experience,"[19] Dufrenne emphasizes that the a priori is "the character of knowledge which is logically, not psychologically, prior to experience and which is both necessary and universal".[20] According to Dufrenne, the a priori is only revealed through the a posteriori.[21] In other words, for Dufrenne the a priori is a logical construct of knowledge that *logically* precedes experience, but which exists solely in its a posteriori realization (see 1.3). The affective a priori is hence the "fact as understood, made explicit and followed through into all of the consequences of its tacit logic"[22] of the aesthetic experience, to say it with Merleau-Ponty. Continuing from the transcendental analysis, Dufrenne treats the metaphysical meaning of the aesthetic experience, which beyond any certain knowledge, is a Hegelian inspired speculation into the ontology of the aesthetic experience and its relation to man and Being. The question for Dufrenne at this point is whether or not the affective meaning of aesthetic experience is *willed* by Being itself. This being said, the majority of *The Phenomenology* is neither transcendental, nor metaphysical, but phenomenological. In awareness of the fact that both the transcendental and metaphysical parts may be considered phenomenological in a wide sense,[23] I will now turn to the more strict sense of phenomenology, phenomenological method. This will provide the basic framework for understanding Dufrenne's theory and the subsequent discussions.

0.3. Phenomenology and method[24]

So far, it is already clear that phenomenology involves describing. But what kind of description and of what? Phenomenological philosophy has a far-reaching history, which goes back to Edmund Husserl who formulated "the first rule"[25] of phenomenology, to "return to the things themselves [Zu den Sachen]."[26] What does this imply? Dufrenne himself did not

[19] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Norman Kemp Smith (Trans.), (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), 43.
[20] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology*, 442.
[21] Ibid., 446.
[22] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 230.
[23] See Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement*, 603.
[24] The main source for 0.3. to 0.3.3. is Merleau-Ponty's Preface in *Phenomenology of Perception* where he discusses the question "What is phenomenology?" Other literature consulted is Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement*. Roman Ingarden, *Innføring I Edmund Husserls Fenomenologi: 10 Oslo-forelesninger 1967*, Per Fr. Christiansen (Trans.), (Oslo: Tanum, 1970). Casey, "Translator's Foreword." Mary Warnock, *Existentialism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970). Sven-Olov Wallenstein (Ed.), *Edmund Husserl*, (Stockholm: Axl Books, 2011). Mikel Dufrenne, "Intentionality and Aesthetics," in Mikel Dufrenne, *In the Presence of the Sensuous*, 3-12.
[25] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, lxxi.
[26] Husserl, quoted in Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement*, 680.

write much on the issue of phenomenology, merely stating in a footnote in the introduction of *The Phenomenology* that

> it will be seen that we are not striving to follow Husserl to the letter. We understand phenomenology in the sense in which Sartre and Merleau-Ponty has acclimated this term in France: a description which aims at an essence, itself defined as a meaning immanent in the phenomenon and given with it.[27]

The quote is repeated in most literature on Dufrenne,[28] but is seldom discussed at length. An exception is Feezel, who in his doctoral thesis "Mikel Dufrenne and the Ontological Question in Art: A Critical Study of *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience"* from 1977 argues that the most fruitful approach to Dufrenne's conception of phenomenology is through Merleau-Ponty.[29] There are several appraisals of Merleau-Ponty in *The Phenomenology*, and Dufrenne openly includes his theory of perception from *Phenomenology of Perception* as the foundation of his own theory of aesthetic perception.[30] This being said, Dufrenne is quite sympathetic towards Heidegger as well. This is evident in Dufrenne's analysis of the truth of aesthetic experience, which I will discuss in chapter three. This is explicated in a short article by Dufrenne, "Intentionality and Aesthetics," which was published immediately after *The Phenomenology*. Here he openly subscribes to an ontological interpretation of Husserl's theory of intentionality (see 0.3.1. under), which is largely influenced by Heidegger.[31]

However, in order to understand the framework for Dufrenne's project, I will first introduce some of the main themes in Husserl's phenomenology, and then keep to Merleau-Ponty in order to briefly explain in what way I read Dufrenne not to "follow Husserl to the letter."

0.3.1. Husserl's phenomenology: The theory of intentionality

The most basic teaching of phenomenology is the theory of intentionality. Briefly, it consists of postulating that every consciousness is consciousness *of* something. In other words, every thought, feeling or judgment, i.e. every act of consciousness, has an object *of* that consciousness. When we see, we are seeing *something* that corresponds to our act of seeing.

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[27] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology*, xlviii.
[28] See for example Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement*, 601. Eugene F. Kaelin, *An Existentialist Aesthetic: The Theories of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty*, (Madison, Milwaukee and London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), 359. Casey, "Translator's Foreword," xxxv.
[29] See Feezel, "Mikel Dufrenne and the Ontological Question in Art," 30-47, for a discussion on Dufrenne's conception of phenomenology.
[30] See 1.2.1. and Dufrenne, 219 and 445.
[31] Dufrenne, "Intentionality and Aesthetics," in Mikel Dufrenne, *In the Presence of the Sensuous: Essays in Aesthetics*, 3-12, (New York: Humanity Books, 1987), 3.

When we think, we think *something* that corresponds to our act of thinking. When we feel, we feel *something*. We do not have a pure consciousness that sometimes happens to think, judge or feel, but rather every consciousness is always a consciousness *of* something. In other words, what is meant by the phenomenologically conception of intentionality is something wholly different from what we usually mean by intention – namely some sort of agency.

Intentionality derives from the Latin verb *intendere*, which means to be *directed* towards something. Thus, intentionality is the doctrine that our consciousness is always *directed towards* something. The theory upholds both a fundamental duality and a unity, that to every *act* of consciousness there corresponds an *object* of consciousness. Husserl termed the difference between the act and object as *noesis* and *noema*. The noesis is the subject pole of the act of intending an object. The object pole, the towards-which the consciousness is directed, is the noema. Let us use an example to make this clearer. Imagine a painting. When you are imagining the painting, you have clear idea of what the painting is like, the colors, the subject matter and so on. When you imagine the painting, you are intending it. You are directing your consciousness towards it, making it appear for your consciousness. The act of imagining the painting is the noesis, while the painting as it is imagined, is the noema of the consciousness. Think now of a specific point or figure in the painting. When you are directing your attention towards it, you are taking *it* as the object of your consciousness. The noema is now the figure you are imagining. The noesis is the figure *as it appears* to consciousness. In other words, there is an intimate correspondence between the noesis and the noema, the act of consciousness and the object of that act. The theory of intentionality, and the correspondence between noesis and noema, is fundamental for Dufrenne's theory.

0.3.2. Phenomenon, essence and the phenomenological reduction

The phenomenological reduction is, according to Spiegelberg, Husserl's key conception.[32] The goal of the reduction is to define the essence of a phenomenon. But what is meant by phenomenon and what is an essence? A phenomenon is an appearance in its appearing. Taking a painting again as an example, I may choose to direct my attention towards its materiality, the physical painting on the canvas. In doing so, I *intend* the *phenomenon* of the materiality of the painting. On the other hand, I can try to interpret the subject matter of the painting, and then direct my attention towards my act of interpretation. Then I am intending the *phenomenon* of the *act* of interpretation. In other words, in intending a phenomenon, I

[32] Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement*, 121.

direct my attention towards a specific way in which something appears and its very appearing *to my consciousness.*

Phenomenologically essences are, moreover, not something mystical or ethereal. Rather, it is the invariant that stays the same, in all the possible variations of a phenomenon. It is that which every phenomenon must be in order for it to be the same phenomenon. In Dufrenne's *The Phenomenology*, his theory of aesthetic experience is aiming at defining that which an experience must be like, in order for it to be an aesthetic experience – namely the essence of aesthetic experience. But essences are not limited to philosophical reflection. Husserl wrote that "everyone is constantly seeing ideas or essences and that everyone uses them in the operations of thought."[33] So, when we are thinking of paintings, indeterminate, we are using the essence of painting, to think of a large amount of objects which all shares something, namely the essence of painting. It is clear that this implies that we do not need to know exactly what the essence is, in order for us to make use of it. To make the essences explicit is the aim of the phenomenological reduction.

There are three main elements involved in the reduction, the *Wesensschau* (phenomenological intuiting), the *eidetic* reduction, (the preliminary reduction) and the e*poché* (the phenomenological reduction proper). The *Wesensschau* is a kind of *Anschauung*, the latter is often translated into *intuiting* in English. Intuiting, which must not be confused with intuition or intention, is a non-deductive grasping of meaning. The *Wesensschau* is then a *phenomenological* intuiting, which differs from the former in that its goal is the *essence* of the phenomenon. This brings us to the next element, the *eidetic* reduction. This reduction is to treat the phenomenon without references to the particular or individual in the phenomenon. In other words, to make way for the *Wesensschau* in order to grasp the essence of the phenomenon in general, rather than the particular phenomenon at hand.

The third element is the *epoché*, which is the phenomenological reduction proper. Although Husserl's understanding of the reduction went through considerable changes, we may say that, in short, it consist of isolating the phenomenon from everything that is non- or transphenomenal. In other words, to get to that which is, without doubt, given. The *epoché* is, through a laborious process, to put out of consideration every ordinary belief of the phenomenon, its existence, its history, its origin and so on. Husserl uses the metaphors "to put out of action," "turn off," "fail to use," or the more well known term "bracketing" to describe

[33] Husserl quoted in Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception: And Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics,* James M. Edie (Ed.), (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 72.

this suspension of belief concerning the phenomenon.[34] Although this has made many critics to consider Husserl as much an idealist as René Descartes, who doubted the very existence of the world, Spiegelberg argues that this is not the case. He writes, "[The reduction] does not mean that we are to forget all about the reduced reality. We are only instructed not to attach any weight to it."[35] The reduction is a suspension of belief, not disbelief. In turn, this has implications for the subject who performs the *epoché*. And this is important. What is left of the subject when all presumptions and beliefs of the phenomenon are suspended is the transcendental subject, the subject that is stripped of everything but its subjectivity. In this sense, we see that the uttermost examination of the object also marks a coming into being of the transcendental subject.

Why then, is the phenomenological reduction important for understanding phenomenology? To Husserl the reduction is what lays the foundation for the description and definition of essences. It is the method of approach to the phenomenon, which is implied by the "first rule of phenomenology," the imperative "to the things themselves." In turn, it is the method that makes it possible to describe and define essences.

To sum up, the phenomenological reductions is to suspend the belief of, and therefore not to take into consideration of, that which is non- or transphenomenal. We are then left with only one possibility, the *Wesensschau*, which is the grasping of essences. The reduction may be noematic or eidetic, that is, directed towards the object of experience or the experience of the object. As we will see, Dufrenne does both in *The Phenomenology*. But before we turn to him, we should see how Merleau-Ponty alters Husserl's conception of phenomenology.

0.3.3. Merleau-Ponty: Existentialism, the body and perception

Merleau-Ponty's conception of phenomenology is largely based on Husserl, but there are some important differences that is important for giving a suitable framework for Dufrenne's theory. The most important difference is the rejection of Husserl's transcendental subject, a rejection based on a different understanding of the reduction and the role of concrete, bodily perception. Roughly put, this signifies the turn towards existentialism which is a characteristic of the *French phase* of phenomenology.[36] In the following, I will elaborate briefly on how this is reflected in the writings of Merleau-Ponty. He writes,

[34] Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement,* 120.
[35] Ibid., 120.
[36] See Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement,* 436-440, for a discussion on the relation between phenomenology and existentialism.

> Phenomenology is the study of essences, and it holds that all problems amount to defining essences, such as the essence of perception or the essence of consciousness. And yet phenomenology is also a philosophy that places essences back within existence and thinks that *the only way to understand man and the world is by beginning from their "facticity."* Although it is a transcendental philosophy that suspends the affirmations of the natural attitude in order to understand them, *it is also a philosophy for which the world is always "already there."*[37]

The view that the world is *always already there* is the key to the paragraph. Contrary to Husserl, Merleau-Ponty always conceives of the subject as a body, situated in the world, which never can be reduced to a transcendental Ego.[38]

> We must – precisely in order to see the world and to grasp it as a paradox – rupture our familiarity with it, and this rupture can teach us nothing except the unmotivated springing forth of the world. *The most important lesson of the reduction is the impossibility of a complete reduction*.[39]

In other words, Merleau-Ponty argues, contrary to Husserl, that the complete phenomenological reduction is impossible. This is so because the world *is already there*, prior to any reflection or thematization of it. We cannot completely, even not temporarily so, suspend *every* non- and transphenomenal relation to the phenomenon, because upon making a reflection, consciousness is "recognizing, prior to its own operations, the world that is given to the subject because the subject is given to himself."[40] However, this does not mean that the reduction is unimportant for Merleau-Ponty. When Merleau-Ponty interprets the husserlian imperative as "first and foremost the disavowal of science," he is giving Husserl's idea of suspension of belief a somewhat narrower application. What phenomenology *can* do is to approach the world that is *already there* in a state of wonder ("rupture our familiarity with it"). Not in order to reveal the transcendental Ego, but in order to broaden the understanding of the intertwining between man and world. The act of *describing* is for Merleau-Ponty an approach for sustaining such a wonder in a philosophy that cannot explain or analyze. This is so because the act of explaining or analyzing is to venture into science – which, according to Merleau-Ponty, is always having the world as *already there* as its presumption. He writes,

> Everything that I know about the world, even through science, I know from a perspective that is my own or from an experience of the world without which scientific symbols would be meaningless. The entire universe of science is constructed upon the lived world, and if we wish to think science rigorously, to appreciate

[37] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, lxx. My italics.
[38] Even though Husserl *did* pay attention to the body, he never went as far as Merleau-Ponty in granting primacy to bodily perception. See Nicholas Smith, "Husserl och Kroppen," in Wallenstein, *Edmund Husserl*, 91-100.
[39] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, lxxvii. My italics.
[40] Ibid., lxxiii.

> precisely its sense and its scope, we must first awaken that experience of the world of which science is the second-order expression.[41]

To Merleau-Ponty then, the world of lived experience, the world of bodily perception that precedes any scientific understanding of the world, must always be taken into account of the philosopher. In *Phenomenology of Perception* he aims at understanding this basic relation between man and world, which I will return to in chapter one when discussing Dufrenne's theory of perception (1.2.1.).

If we now return to Dufrenne's short footnote, we might understand things a bit more clearly. Similar to Merleau-Ponty, and contrary to Husserl, Dufrenne holds that the subject should not be an "impersonal subject… but a concrete subject capable of sustaining a vital relationship with a world."[42] The task of the phenomenologist is to describe, from the first-person perspective, the chosen phenomenon in order to understand what makes the phenomenon what it is, and how it is as such for the concrete subject. As we will see, the essence of the phenomenon is not something that exists before or beyond the given phenomenon, but is, according to Dufrenne, only realized by the phenomenon itself. We will now turn to Dufrenne's theory of aesthetic experience and the concepts of aesthetic object, aesthetic perception, feeling, the affective a priori and truth.

[41] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, lxxii.
[42] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology*, 437.

One | A reading of *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*

1.0. Introduction

As stated in the previous chapter, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience* is mainly a description of the aesthetic experience. In short, Dufrenne proposes that the aesthetic object may be described as a *quasi-subject* that expresses a *world*, while the aesthetic perception is the culmination of perception in *feeling*, which is the reading of the expressed world of the aesthetic object by means of *being-in-depth*. The duality between the aesthetic object and aesthetic perception is intentional in structure. Like every perceived object, the aesthetic object is relative to the spectator's perception of it, but the perception of the object is at the same time governed by the expression of the aesthetic object. The transcendental analytic aims to examine the transcendental conditions that makes aesthetic experience possible. Dufrenne's conclusion is the launching of the term *the affective a priori*, which is the logical abstraction of the a posteriori actualization of aesthetic experience. Furthermore, he discusses the relation between the affective a priori, truth and the real, and argues that the affective a priori illuminates the real in order to reveal Being to man.

In this chapter I will go through the main lines of the theory presented above in some detail. However, as the book covers a lot of ground with its 556 pages, it's needless to say that in the present survey I will have to select the themes that I consider most important. I have chosen to focus on the phenomenological parts of the work, leaving most of Part II "Analysis of the Work of Art" unmentioned. Some of Dufrenne's descriptions in Part I "Phenomenology of the Aesthetic Object" such as the notions of performance, taste and the constitution of a public, are also omitted. Beyond the phenomenological parts, I have included part IV "Critique of Aesthetic Experience" as the transcendental analysis and the discussion of truth are crucial to Dufrenne's theory. I have chosen not to treat the metaphysical speculation, as it is not necessary for a general understanding of Dufrenne's theory. Let us now turn to Dufrenne's description of the aesthetic object.

1.1. The aesthetic object and the work of art

In the introduction of *The Phenomenology* Dufrenne states that "the aesthetic object can itself be defined only as the correlate of aesthetic experience."[43] This circular statement forms our entrance to Dufrenne's theory – for what is aesthetic experience if not the experience of an

[43] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology*, xlviii.

aesthetic object? Where should we enter the circle? As mentioned introductory (0.2.) Dufrenne's main issue in *The Phenomenology* may be seen as an attempt to reconcile the object and subject of aesthetic experience through the notion of the affective a priori, a fact that surfaces already at this point of the argument. We can read from the statement that the aesthetic object and the experiencing subject are closely interrelated on the verge of being interdependent. How can we then talk about an *object* of experience as separate from the experience? The theory of intentionality (0.3.1.) faces the same problem. What is the noema without the noesis? What is the experienced object separated from the experience of that very same object? Dufrenne breaks into the circle by stating that "the correlation of the object with the act which grasps it does not subordinate the object to the act."[44] In other words, we can talk about the things we experience without explicit reference to our act of experiencing them, "for the aesthetic object is within consciousness without being of it; and, conversely, the work of art is outside consciousness, a thing among things, yet it exists only as referred to a consciousness".[45] He continues, "we can thus locate the aesthetic object by examining the work of art as a thing in the world, independently of the act which aims at it."[46] But if the location of the aesthetic object is to be found by reference to the *work of art*, what is the relation between the two, are they identical? No, Dufrenne writes, and at this point we have to make clear what is meant by *the work of art* and *the aesthetic object*.

The notion of *the work of art* is more or less the same as that which we refer to when we in common day language talk about an art work. It is the painting in the museum or the sculpture in the park. It is a thing among other things that exists in the world. It is the painting for the moving man or the art historian, something with properties such as weight and size, but also something that may depict a certain motive and may be made with a certain technique, inviting interpretation. As mentioned (0.2.), Dufrenne decides to rely on tradition in the question of what the work of art is. It may be discussed if this is a good approach, but it certainly makes the way for going straight to the point, which is to describe an *exemplary* aesthetic experience in the fullest and most detailed way possible. "As no one doubts the presence of works of art and the genuineness of the finest works," Dufrenne writes, "the aesthetic object, if we define it in relation to them, can be easily located."[47] And such is the task at hand, not to define the art work, but the aesthetic object and experience.

[44] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology*, li.
[45] Ibid., lii.
[46] Ibid., li.
[47] Ibid.

Then, on the other hand we have *the aesthetic object,* which is the work of art as perceived. It is perceived not only as such – as we may perceive it as a material object, as a *work* of art - but perceived for its own sake, i.e. aesthetically. Aesthetic perception is to recognize the work of art as "the sensuous appearing in its glory."[48] That is, to perceive it as something that deserves attention or rather, as we will see, that demands attention. The key term here is *the sensuous*[49] which is according to Dufrenne "an act common to perceiver and perceived."[50] While ordinary perception conjures brute sensuousness, aesthetic perception is needed in order to transform it into aesthetic sensuousness.[51] The aesthetic object exists in the sensuous realm and in the sensuous realm alone. The aesthetic object that stems from the painting is solely visual, and as I will elaborate further down (1.1.3.), its entire being lies in visuality.

But is this to reduce the aesthetic object to a meaningless impression? An empty sensory experience? Not at all. The aesthetic object is saturated with meaning, which is "immanent in the sensuous, being its very organization."[52] This meaning must not be thought of like a semantic meaning or a symbolic meaning, but an expressive or affective meaning, which we will return to in 1.1.2.

The aesthetic object is the work of art perceived for its own sake. But is the aesthetic object something else than the work of art, some idea hovering above it, or is it identical to the work of art? Neither. Dufrenne gives the aesthetic object a virtual existence, an implicit existence, inherent in the work of art, as if waiting to be released from it. As we saw introductory the aesthetic object does not exist independent of human consciousness but it is still not *of it*. It has its objective being only through the work of art *joined* by the perceiving subject. But perception, Dufrenne argues, does not create a new object. The perceived object (noesis) is the same as the object perceived (noema). The same holds true for the aesthetic object. The aesthetic object of the painting or the cathedral is not something else than the painting or the cathedral, but the work needs perception to become fully alive – to reveal its full potential. Dufrenne writes that the aesthetic object is the telos or the goal of the work of

[48] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology,* 86.
[49] French: *le sensible*. Sometimes translated perceptible or sensuous element. See translator's note at Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology,* xlviii. 3n.
[50] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology,* xlviii.
[51] Ibid., 137-138.
[52] Ibid., 12.

art. For in "the moment it becomes an aesthetic object the work of art is truly a work of art."[53] According to Dufrenne, the work of art needs perception in order to truly be itself.

To sum up, Dufrenne separates the work of art from the aesthetic object, the latter being the work of art when it is perceived for its own sake. But what is the aesthetic object, and what separates it from any other object?

1.1.1. The being of the aesthetic object: towards the quasi subject

In order to get a clear understanding of what the aesthetic object is, Dufrenne goes through a comparison based on a descriptive analysis of the aesthetic object, the living being, the natural object, the object of use and the signifying object. The comparison concludes with the launching of the term *quasi-subject*, which Dufrenne denotes as the being of the aesthetic object as both in-itself and for-itself. The two latter terms are taken from Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, in which Sartre sets out to understand the relation between man and world, which compromises being-in-the-world, and further what man and world must *be* in order to make possible such a form of being.[54] Briefly, Sartre's notion of the in-itself denotes the solid being of the object, while the for-itself denotes human consciousness. According to Sartre an in-itself-for-itself is impossible, since a thing cannot be conscious. As we will see further down, Dufrenne disagrees by stating that the aesthetic object is both an in-itself, as it indeed is an inanimate object, but also a quasi-for-itself, as it *expresses* subjectivity.

The aesthetic object is present to the spectator through a human made object, the work of art. As such it refers to human consciousness as a created object. It is different from the object of use, however, in that its purpose for being is *not* that which may be done with it. The aesthetic object has no anterior purpose. While the hammer is used for hammering, the painting *as an aesthetic object* is completely useless – it only solicits perception.[55] Since the aesthetic object is useless, it recalls the object of nature and the exteriority and solidity of the in-itself, which does not exist for our sake. Nonetheless, in order to be present for consciousness it must be available for perception. In other words, the aesthetic object, like any perceivable object is also *for-us*. Thus, there is a certain *otherness* to the aesthetic object, which separates it from the object of use, which always bespeaks its purpose for the human being. But can we not use the painting for other purposes than perception? Yes, but if we are

[53] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology*, 15-16.
[54] Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, Hazel E. Barnes, (Trans.), (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 28.
[55] As we will see in 1.3.2.3., this does not mean that aesthetic experience may not have a function.

holding the painting over our head in order to protect us from rain, or putting it on the floor, using it as a doormat – it is clear that it is neither a good umbrella, nor doormat, and that its purpose lies elsewhere. Rather, the painting could be taken as a signifying object, by focusing on its represented content. This is true, but when we perceive the painting as a signifying object, it ceases to be an aesthetic object. The work of art is the structural foundation for the aesthetic object, and the latter is, Dufrenne writes, "above all, the irresistible and magnificent presence of the sensuous."[56] I must emphasize again, as it is of utter importance, that the aesthetic object is the work of art when, and only when, it is perceived aesthetically. But can every object be turned into an aesthetic object just by perceiving it aesthetically? In theory, yes – but the work of art is according to Dufrenne a privileged object that first and foremost demands aesthetic perception, rather than action or interpretation. Dufrenne does not deny that both objects of use, or any object for that matter, may be perceived as aesthetic objects, but decides not to discuss borderline cases. But how does the aesthetic object demand attention?

Even though the aesthetic object has its similarities to nature, it is also similar to the object of use. As mentioned, both are man made objects. This is attested by the fact that they are given form. While most agree that nature is there by chance, both the object of use and the aesthetic object are the result of human labor. But while the object of use is given form in accordance with an anterior purpose, the aesthetic object has no other purpose than the form itself. However, the form must not be considered as arbitrary, rather the form is the very way in which the aesthetic object makes sense. Dufrenne writes, "A sense is always immanent in the sensuous, and this sense is, above all, the form which manifests both the plenitude and the necessity of the sensuous."[57] This point will be elaborated in chapter two, and it suffices here to say that Dufrenne conceives of the organization of the structures of the work of art, as the sense inherent in the sensuous.[58]

Furthermore, the form of any artifact carries with it the presence of its making. But while the object of use seeks to hide the presence of its creator, the aesthetic object exhibits it. This is an important point. The object of use, most often mass-produced by machines, but even so when produced by hand, attest to its human creation by its form, but not in the same manner as the aesthetic object. The form that exhibits its creator Dufrenne denotes as *style*.

[56] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology*, 86.
[57] Ibid., 89.
[58] The structure of the work of art is discussed at great length by Dufrenne in Part II "Analysis of the Work of Art," but it is beyond the scope of this thesis to go into this in detail as it is, as an objective analysis, the least phenomenological part of *The Phenomenology*. See 1.0.

The style is the presence of the creator. But according to Dufrenne, it is not the *historical* creator, rather the *phenomenological* creator who is present. What is the difference? The historical creator was the person who created the work of art at some point in history. But we cannot know anything of him through the aesthetic object. Rather, the phenomenological creator is the creator that is present through the *aesthetic object* (which is the work of art perceived for its own sake). In this sense, it does not matter whether or not we know who the historical person who created the work was, as long as the aesthetic object attests to this creator. Style does in other words attest to the personality that created the work of art, regardless of who that person was. Style is present only through the aesthetic object. Nonetheless, a hand-crafted object of use, such as a carpet or a chair, may indeed exhibit the style of its creator, but these are again borderline cases that Dufrenne refuses to discuss. The point is that the form of the aesthetic object is meaningful, not by referring to something else, but by its very organization. It forms a style that attests to the personality of its creator. In other words, the aesthetic object signifies beyond itself, not by reference, but by being *expressive*. It expresses by the presence of its creator. Or rather, the creator expresses himself through the work, as only a subject may be expressive. How we shall understand Dufrenne's notion of expression brings us to his distinction between the aesthetic object and the signifying object.

Dufrenne terms the signifying object as an object that aims at a truth beyond that which is given. Its function, Dufrenne writes, "is not to subserve some action or to satisfy a need but to dispense knowledge. We can, of course, call all objects signifying in some sense."[59] The latter sentence is important, for it emphasizes the fact that while aesthetic perception must be performed in order for the aesthetic object to appear, the same work of art may be considered a signifying object under another gaze. When we seek knowledge *by* or *through* an object, it is in Dufrenne's sense, a signifying object. In contrast, as we shall see, the truth of the aesthetic object is never to be found beyond the sensuous, but solely in the sensuous. In other words, when we are looking at a painting aesthetically, we are not interested in the motive that is depicted as such. We are interested in that which is expressed through the depiction. Dufrenne writes, "expression is the mode of revelation for whatever lacks a concept, since there are concepts only of objects."[60] According to Dufrenne we may think of aesthetic expression as a kind of language, distinct from conceptual language. After

[59] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology*, 114.
[60] Ibid., 131.

all, when we are describing an aesthetic experience we are "concerned with the relationship of one language to another whereby a commentary is forced to reexpress an object already expressed by means of art."[61] But contrary to ordinary language, which mainly expresses by way of reference between the sign and the signified, in aesthetic "language" the sign and the signified coincide. This is similar to how we understand bodily gestures, which I will discuss in chapter two. The act of crying does not refer to grief, it *is* grief.[62] Similar, the aesthetic object does not refer to expression; it *is* the very expression it expresses. This character of being expressive, which is confined solely to the sensuousness of the aesthetic object, Dufrenne terms as *affective*. It is not a property projected onto the aesthetic object. Rather, it is part of its constitution, what constitutes the object as an aesthetic object (see 1.1.2.).

To sum up, the aesthetic object is an independent object of the world, and therefore an in-itself. Like every in-itself, it is dependent on perception in order to be present for consciousness, and therefore also a for-us. It is without purpose and therefore distinct from the object of use, but similar insofar as it attest to its creation by form. Style is the form of the aesthetic object, through which the phenomenological creator expresses himself. The expression is present in the aesthetic object solely through the sensuous, and not by reference. Expression is the mode of revelation of the affective character of the aesthetic object. Since the aesthetic object bears its expression within itself, and expresses its affectivity *by* itself, Dufrenne concludes that we should consider it not only an in-itself-for-us, but also a quasi-for-itself. Or rather, a quasi subject. The aesthetic object is a proxy for its creator, through which he is expressed. However, as we shall see in 1.3.1., the expression of the aesthetic object transcends the singularity of the expression of the creator. This will make all the more sense when the expression and affectivity of the quasi subject is unified in the notion of the *world* of the aesthetic object.

1.1.2. The world of the aesthetic object

What is the world of the aesthetic object? When we perceive paintings aesthetically, according to Dufrenne, they stand out from the regular world of ordinary perception.[63] This ability to stand out from the ordinary and demand our attention pertains to the expressive *world* of the aesthetic object. The world of the aesthetic object is not reducible to its objective

[61] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology*, 124.
[62] As we shall see in chapter two, Dufrenne is very close to Max Scheler and Maurice Merleau-Ponty on how to understand expression.
[63] For more on the notion of world, see 1.3.2.1.

being, but transcends its objectivity as a quasi subject. This notion of the world of the aesthetic object is somewhat enigmatic and ambiguous, as Dufrenne writes and contradicts himself, "in truth, it is less a world than the atmosphere of a world, in the sense that we say an atmosphere is tense or lively."[64] The world of the aesthetic object is not a unified ecological system, nor the object of any geography. It is not even the represented object found in figurative painting. It is rather something similar to the worldview or *Weltanschauung* of man. Dufrenne writes that the *Weltanschauung* is "the vital metaphysical element in all men, the way of being in the world which reveals itself in a personality."[65] The aesthetic world radiates in a similar fashion, transcending itself through expression, as joyous, tender, elegant, tragic or comic and so on.[66]

However, this ability to express, to unfold a world of its own depend on two factors, the latter following from the first. (1) We can only speak of the world of the aesthetic object in so far as it is a created object that attests to its creator through expression. Only subjectivity is capable of expression – which qualifies the term quasi-subjectivity. The quasi-subjectivity of the aesthetic object derives from the subjectivity of its creator. (2) Contrary to the work of art that exists in objective, measurable time and space, the aesthetic object, like all subjects, expresses and forms its own space and time.

Dufrenne conceives of space and time as unity, thus every spatiality contains a temporal horizon, and vice versa. All too briefly put, the objective structure of the painting, forms the spatiality and therefore also the temporality of the aesthetic object.[67]

But it is erroneous to say, as I did above, that (2) follows from (1), rather it is the opposite. Dufrenne would say that when we experience the aesthetic object aesthetically, we experience it as expressing its own time and space, and *therefore* we are experiencing it as a kind of subjectivity. However, since an in-itself cannot be a subjectivity itself, there must be a subjectivity that expresses itself through the in-itself, namely the (phenomenological) creator.

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[64] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology,* 168.
[65] Ibid., 177.
[66] This notion of world, as I will return to in chapter three when discussing Heidegger's notion of world, is distinct from the objective world of science, but is not antagonistic to it. To Dufrenne, the objective world is only available to reason, established on the ground of the subjective world of existing human beings. However, this does not imply that the human world is *merely* subjective, rather it is "a world in which and on which the subject harmonizes with other subjects." Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology,* 191. The subjective world is then the possibility for *any conception* of an objective world at all. To Dufrenne the objective world rests on the total of subjective worlds in which it participates. See also 1.3.2.1.
[67] This is in short the main insights in Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology,* 239-326, Part II "Analysis of the Work of Art," which are not strictly phenomenological. It depends on an objectifying attitude towards the *work of art* in order to describe the objective structures from which expression radiates from the *aesthetic object*.

Therefore we can call the aesthetic object an in-itself and *quasi*-for-itself – or rather, a quasi subject.

Returning to the initial question (what is the world of the aesthetic object?), we get that the quasi subject expresses its own space and time. And like every subject who not only exists *in* time and space, but who also *unfolds* their own time and space, this experience of the world is always, Dufrenne would say, a *Weltanschauung*. The life of the subject is always unfolding in some way, in some tempo or quality. We say that time goes fast when we have a good time, or that sometimes the world is gray. As we shall see in chapter two, such states of being are never entirely private, but are always expressed by our behavior. In a similar fashion, again to be elaborated in chapter two, the quasi subject expresses its world as an *affective* world. Its expressed time and space is never meaningless to the spectator who perceives. But this meaning is not conceptual – it is beyond analysis, Dufrenne states, only attainable through perception. Its expression is not ideal, but purely sensuous. Dufrenne concludes, "it suffices for us to have shown that the aesthetic object is, like subjectivity itself, the source of a peculiar world that cannot be reduced to the objective world."[68] The world of the aesthetic object is in other words the unified expression of affectivity, given in the sensuous. In order to further understand Dufrenne's description of the aesthetic experience, we have to leave the object-pole (noema) of experience to the subject-pole (noesis), from the aesthetic object to aesthetic perception. Afterwards, we shall continue to the transcendental analysis of the experience, which seeks to describe the necessary logical relation between aesthetic object and perception.

1.2. Aesthetic perception

According to Dufrenne, aesthetic perception is not a form of perception strictly separate from ordinary perception, but rather a prolongation of it, a perception in-depth. Aesthetic perception is first and foremost the ability to apply *feeling* to the aesthetic object.[69] Feeling is the subject's ability to read the expression of the aesthetic object as it is given in the sensuous. But if aesthetic perception is reduced to the mere application of feeling of something expressed, is this not to reduce the aesthetic experience to immediate sense impressions, devoid of any value? No, aesthetic feeling always implies a certain reflection. But what is the relation between aesthetic perception and ordinary perception? What is the reflection involved

[68] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology,* 197.
[69] As we will see in 1.2.2. feeling [Fr. *sentiment*] is not emotion nor a mere sentiment. It is, I will argue in chapter two, in close resemblance with what we call *empathy*.

in aesthetic perception? In order to explain these aspects of Dufrenne's thesis I will begin by first briefly discussing his general theory of perception, as it forms the basis for the aesthetic perception, then continue to his treatment of feeling and reflection.

1.2.1. Perception: presence and imagination

Bodily presence is, according to Dufrenne, the most basic contact between man and the world. Presence is the level of the given, not the known. But the known presupposes the given in order for it to be known. At this level, which is beyond or, rather, before the constitution of the difference between subject and object, man and world forms a totality. This is not a theory of monism, but rather the unity that diversity presupposes.[70] At this level, presence is always a bodily presence. When we for instance perceive a work of art, we must be present with our bodies in order for it to be present for us. It is not enough to imagine the work, either based on our own or others previous experiences, such as descriptions of the work. These experiences Dufrenne would not consider aesthetic. Aesthetic experience always demands bodily presence. However, perception must involve imagination in order to be explicit. Without leaving presence behind, we will not turn to imagination.

Where we leave the pre-objective level of the given, in order to approach the known, is where imagination enters. There is a close bond between perception and imagination for Dufrenne, which separates him clearly from Sartre, who saw the two terms as mutually exclusive.[71] Perception is always meaningful, and the objects of perception are therefore appearances, or rather *images,* in the most ordinary sense of the term. This does not mean that the world in which we live is a mere construct of our own mind. Rather there is a constant oscillation between what is given in presence, what we sense, and what sense we make of it. Perception is not an act of reflection. Rather we go straight to the meaning of what we sense. We may immediately hear somebody *open a door* behind our back. That is to say, we don't have to deduce from our sense experiences what we hear. Rather, we immediately perceive the world as meaningful. Perception is of course not perfect knowledge, because we would need to address the faculty of understanding in order to get certain knowledge. In fact, we may be mistaken, maybe we heard wrong. But this does not undermine the fact that the most basic relation we have to the world lies in perception. But how do we form images by he

[70] This is also the most basic teaching of Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of Perception*, which harks back to both Sartre, Heidegger and Husserl. See *Phenomenology of Perception*, esp. "Part Two: The Perceived World" 207-384.

[71] "Thus, for Sartre, imagination is unreducible to perception because of its characteristic charm. Imagination is opposed to perception as magic is to technique." Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology,* 354.

given? In other words, how is it that we see things and people, and not just various shapes and colors?

Briefly put, Dufrenne separates between transcendental and empirical imagination. The former is the possibility of the latter. This means that from the level of ordinary perception we get appearances, which by the faculty of imagination may be formed into images. I would like to emphasize the difference between the empirical imagination and fantasy at this point. The latter, while presupposing the former, is the presence of something that does not correspond to our empirical experiences at the level of perception. The former is the constitution of objects *as objects* always referring to our bodily perception of them. Imagination is our ability to see things *as* things. Although objects of the world have meaning to us even at the level of the pre-objective (we do not need to be attentive to the chair in order to use it), it is at the level of imagination we may perceive objects *as* something. This is most apparent when we are attentive to something. I may stop my current flow of action in order to be attentive to the perceptive field around me, for instance by being attentive to the fact that I am sitting in a chair, right now. By this act of attention we form a representation of the object. So to say, holding it still, despite its ordinary being in the flow of time.[72] However, we said that the transcendental imagination is the possibility of the empirical. This means that when we get sense impressions, we have the ability to understand the given in several ways. The same cloud may be shaped like a face or an animal, a house or a carrot, and these possibilities are only possible on behalf of the transcendental imagination. However, when we see the cloud either as a face or as a house, it is actualized in empirical imagination. Transcendental imagination is therefore the possibility of empirical imagination.

This is important for the aesthetic object, and especially the aesthetic object stemming from the pictorial arts – which often represent something. Our ability to fix a motive, is only possible because we have the ability to see something (here colors on a canvas) *as* something (the motive). But imagination does not stop at constituting the object of perception. Based on our lived experience, the transcendental imagination enriches the empirical. Our previous perceptions of objects are always present in the background of our current perception. We know that snow is cold, because we have experienced it previously. Thus, when we see snow depicted in a painting, we experience it implicitly as being cold. This kind of perception can of course be fallible, but that is beside the point for Dufrenne. The point is that we do not

[72] According to Dufrenne attentiveness is to take refuge in the past in order to perceive the future, for only action, never contemplation, is possible in the now.

merely see something as something, but that the object of experience is always also furnished by the transcendental imagination, which gives it its richness.

But how does this relate to aesthetic experience? Dufrenne writes "The real task of imagination in aesthetic experience is…to grasp the represented object *in appearance*, without substituting it for…an imaginary object held to be more uniquely true."[73] In other words, the role of imagination is to, literary speaking, unify the picture given to us in presence. This is true both of figurative and non-figurative pictorial art. Both need imagination in order to be present for the spectator, not only as the material objects they are, but as unified, visual appearances. The aesthetic object does not represent the real, but presents a real, or rather, as we have seen, a world. The world of the aesthetic experience must be experienced as real enough to affect us, and that is the role of imagination – to present the painting up to consciousness as something that has significance to us.

From presence, perception and imagination we can go two ways, either towards understanding and reflection, or towards feeling. Dufrenne's theory of understanding I will not address much at all, as it is not crucial to the argument. But I will return to reflection further down. Finally, we get to feeling. More will be said about feeling in the following subchapters, for the present matter it suffices to outline its general characteristics. As already mentioned, feeling is the reading of expression and it is the most prominent aspect of aesthetic perception. As we have seen (1.1.2.) expression is always given in the sensuous, and the sensuous is, as it was, the act common to the perceiver and the perceived. In other words, feeling must apply to the sensuous. But is not feeling then a return to the most fundamental aspect of perception, namely presence? Dufrenne lists three reasons why this is not so, which helps to clarify what he means by feeling.

(1) The object of feeling is not simply presence as it supposes an interior to the object. This interior, which Dufrenne terms *depth*, is not physical, but a dimension of the aesthetic object that attest to its humanity, its quasi-subjectivity. (2) Feeling implies a new attitude held by the spectator. The spectator must conform himself *and match his depth* to that which is revealed by feeling in order for feeling to appear. (3) Feeling presupposes that there is more to the aesthetic object than that which is appearing, through imagination, in representation. In other words, the object of feeling is the expressive, not the represented. Of course (1) and (3) implies each other and corresponds to the descriptions of the aesthetic object in 1.1.1. and

[73] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology*, 367.

1.1.2. However, in both (1) and (2) a new element is mentioned and that is the notion of *depth*, which we will turn to in the next subchapter.

Summing up, there have been two reasons for this general overview. First, it would have been superficial to go straight to aesthetic perception without at least give an overview of the presuppositions that it implies, such as presence and representation. Secondly, the overview makes it evident that, for Dufrenne, aesthetic perception is not reducible to either bodily perception, or some sort of process pertaining to the imagination, nor to the faculty of understanding. According to Dufrenne, aesthetic perception is irreducible. As he writes, "what is said by the work can be said in no other way."[74] And conversely we may add, what is revealed by feeling, can be revealed in no other way. The way we experience what the work says is by being in accordance with it, applying our depth to it, reading it by means of feeling. We will now turn to Dufrenne's description of feeling and depth.

1.2.2. Feeling as being-in-depth

Dufrenne's notion of depth is important, as it is both the bridge between feeling and expression, as well as being that which secures both the noetic and the existential function of aesthetic *experience*, which I will explain in the following.. The affective of aesthetic experience takes place in the depths of the aesthetic object and the spectator, being as the formula goes, an act common to the object and subject. Dufrenne emphasizes that the depth of the spectator, like the aesthetic perception itself, must be conceived in its double relation with the depth of the aesthetic object. How shall we make sense of this?

Basically, depth means human depth. It does not have anything to do with the physical depth of objective space, nor, as we shall see, the unconscious. Rather, we should understand human depth as the depth of personality, the presence of our past in the now, which saturates the present with the past. Dufrenne does not deny that we are formed by our past experiences, and that this indeed is a part of our unconscious life. His distinction aims at refusing to give primacy to the past on behalf of the presence. Thus, depth of personality, human depth, is to Dufrenne an experience of the now imbedded with the past, rather than an unconscious re-experience of the past in the presence.[75] Depth is to be fully present, to be sensitive, in contrast to be superficial or indifferent. It is, according to Dufrenne, to commit oneself, by

[74] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology,* 391.
[75] It can be argued that Dufrenne has a quite narrow conception of the unconscious, and that the experience of a now imbedded with the past indeed can be conceived of as the unconscious saturating our conscious experience. Nevertheless, it is besides the point for Dufrenne, who's aim is to describe in what way the past is present in the now from a phenomenologically, not a psychologically, informed perspective.

living from the inside out. Depth, in this understanding, belongs to aesthetic feeling insofar as aesthetic feeling is to commit oneself to the aesthetic object, so to say living it, letting oneself be fully present to it. Dufrenne writes that depth "is what distinguishes feeling from simple impressions, and it is feeling – not our impressions – that corresponds to expression in the object."[76] Feeling is to be sensitive to the expression of the aesthetic object, and the ability to be sensitive pertains to the depth of the subject. In a clear polemic to Husserl's conception of the phenomenological reduction (0.3.2.) Dufrenne writes,

> Before the aesthetic object…I am neither a pure consciousness in the sense of a transcendental *cogito* nor a pure look, since my look is laden with all that I am. The aesthetic object does not really belong to me unless I belong to it.[77]

I read Dufrenne's main point to be that when we perceive aesthetically we must be willing to give primacy to the aesthetic object. We cannot expect it to succumb to our wishes, but we must commit ourselves *with all that we are* to it. Only when we open our selves to it will it open itself to us, letting expression flourish. In contrast, when we refuse to open up, when we are merely giving the work a glance in the passing, it will not express anything at all. Aesthetic feeling is, according to Dufrenne, not just perceiving, and not just being-in-the-world, but being-in-depth *with* the world. Dufrenne thus conceives of the aesthetic experience as an act of participation, that it involves a certain attitude from the subject towards the work in order for it to become an aesthetic object. This attitude, this act of participation, is a strictly personal enterprise. But it is not personal in the sense that we re-experience a private moment of our past in the present, as when a certain painting may evoke a memory in us. Rather, it is personal in the sense that we must be able to emotionally *understand* the expression given; we must let the expression of the aesthetic object make us reverberate. But this form of understanding (which I will return to in 1.2.4.) is only available through feeling, understood as being-in-depth. It is not something we can learn from others, it is part of our very being. Feeling is indeed knowing by acquaintance. Moreover, by opening up to the aesthetic object, we are opening up ourselves to ourselves. We ourselves are in this sense revealed in the aesthetic experience. The aesthetic experience has therefore an existential function – it constitutes the perceiving subject. It consists not so much in making us explicitly aware of our selves perceiving, as it is making ourselves present to ourselves within our experience. This might be somewhat clearer when we now turn to the depth of the aesthetic object, the necessary correlate of feeling, and later to the notion of the a priori.

[76] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology*, 404.
[77] Ibid., 404.

1.2.3. The depth of the aesthetic object

Similar to the depth of feeling, the depth of the aesthetic object is not physical, nor temporal. It has nothing to do with the work of art being from another culture or from a distant time of the past. When perceived aesthetically, it ceases to be an object of the past, in order to be fully present in the now. Rather the depth of the aesthetic object relates to its character of *as-if*, as being a *quasi* subject. The aesthetic object has depth *as if* it is a subject. But contrary to the conscious subject, it is not a living being. Rather, its depth lies in its ability to express, which is to unfold a world. Similar to the subject, who lives *out* his being, by always transcending himself in behavior (see chapter two), the aesthetic object transcends itself by unfolding a world. Dufrenne emphasizes that this is not to bestow the aesthetic object with a consciousness, but rather the aesthetic object is the proxy of a consciousness. The world of the aesthetic object is, as we have seen, not available for ordinary understanding, but still feeling is to *know* this world. For, Dufrenne writes, "to comprehend is no longer to explain but to feel."[78] Feeling is to comprehend the expression of the aesthetic object, something the spectator must do by 'leveling' with the object – by submitting to its depth by his own depth, and thus letting it echo in him. The depth of the aesthetic object is nothing without its realization in aesthetic experience, as it is nothing but the necessary correlate of the depth of the spectator. Expression in-depth is in this sense a tautology as expression *is* depth. Depth is a characteristic of the self-transcending being.

However, despite its quasi-subjectivity the aesthetic object is always dependent on the spectator in order to exist at all. Dufrenne writes, "it seems, then, that consciousness lends to the aesthetic object something of its own being."[79] This clarifies the point in 1.2.2. where I wrote that through opening up to the aesthetic object, we are opening ourselves to ourselves. In aesthetic perception we are making our interior available to the object, and by supposing *its* interior we live out our depth. Although the level of dedication by the spectator decides how fruitful the experience will be, we have already seen that the object itself must be in-depth, that is, being expressive. The aesthetic object must offer itself to the spectator as worthy of being perceived, as much as the spectator must offer himself to the object in order to let it be expressive. We have seen this unity between the aesthetic object and the aesthetic perception throughout the whole theory of Dufrenne, and it will be made explicit in the notion of *the affective a priori* which I will explain in 1.3. But before treating the a priori, we have to

[78] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology*, 411.
[79] Ibid., 413.

conclude in what way the aesthetic perception relates to reflection, because although aesthetic perception culminates in feeling, it always involves reflection.

1.2.4. Feeling and reflection

The world of the aesthetic object is, as we have seen, not available for ordinary understanding, but still feeling is to *know* this world. For as we just saw, Dufrenne writes, "to comprehend is no longer to explain but to feel."[80] To feel is to comprehend the expression of the aesthetic object. But when we comprehend something aesthetically, it is not enough according to Dufrenne, to simply *live* this comprehension. At some level, aesthetic experience involves reflection. Dufrenne discusses three different forms of reflection that we ordinarily employ when experiencing art.

The two first he calls determinant reflections, both of which are relevant for our perception, but which in turn separates us from the object. The first is the critical reflection. It denotes our act of clarifying the perceived reality of the work of art by trying to sort our impressions out. A structural analysis is an example of this. Such an analysis is conducted in order to see structures in the object that are not apparent at first sight. By making these structures explicit, we may be more prepared to perceive the expressivity of the aesthetic object.

Second is the reflection of the significance of the work. Often, Dufrenne argues, we seek to understand how the work so to say functions, to understand why it is expressive. A common way of doing this is by referring to the creator of the work. The painting is expressing sadness because the painter was sad while painting it. Or, again we may try to use critical reflection, arguing that the person on the portrait is beautiful because his face is symmetrical and showing good proportions. Either way, such reflection separates us from the object and seeks reason for its being outside of it, rather than in it. Attempts to explain how the work functions are ultimately futile, Dufrenne writes, since "what is said by the work can be said in no other way."[81]

Rather than a determinant reflection, Dufrenne argues that we employ an indeterminate reflection in aesthetic perception. He describes this reflection as sympathetic, always in the attempt to remain faithful to the work, such that "an understanding of the work

[80] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology*, 411.
[81] Ibid., 391. It must be mentioned, and Dufrenne is of course aware of this, that such is the task for Dufrenne in Part II "Analysis of the Work of Art." It is an objective analysis that tries to explain how a work of art may be expressive in terms of its objective structure, and therefore, as I have mentioned, not strictly speaking phenomenological.

comes no longer from the discovery of who produced it but, rather, from seeing how it produces and unfolds itself."[82] This form of reflection is not the same as feeling, but always in close relation to it, because the expression that is felt must also be understood, lest aesthetic experience is reduced to fleeting sense experiences. In other words, we must not only have aesthetic experiences, but also *know* that we have them. Dufrenne writes,

> Feeling can have a noetic function and value only as a reflective act, in part a victory over former reflection and in part open to a new reflection. Otherwise, feeling would revert to the pure and simple nonreflective level of presence, that is, to what is not knowledge [*connaissance*] and barely even consciousness.[83]

What's at stake is the irreducibility of aesthetic experience. If aesthetic experience does not involve some form of reflection, what makes it explicitly stand out from mere sense impressions? Dufrenne holds that there is a constant oscillation between the indeterminate reflection and feeling. So, by employing reflection the spectator does not want to *explain* the work. Rather he *pays attention* to the expression as it unfolds. By reflecting on the experience, the experience may stand more clearly out. Reflection may assist perception, by making us more aware of our experiences. But conversely, it is aesthetic perception that is the basis for reflection.

Moreover, not only does the aesthetic experience have a existential function, as we saw in 1.2.2., it has a noetic function. I will return to this in 1.3., and for now it suffices to say that, according to Dufrenne, aesthetic *perception* is to *know* the expressed world of the aesthetic object, which is affective.[84] To know something involves, as we saw introductory (0.3.1.), to have an object of that knowledge. To have a noetic function is then to reveal a noema, which is, as it were, the object-pole of an intentional act. As we will explain in more depth when considering the affective a priori, aesthetic *experience* reveals the noetic aspect of affectivity by constituting its objectivity. Contrary, as Dufrenne states above, our experience of mere presence does not have a noetic function, as it is pre-objective, being the conditions for both perception and reflection. As we have seen, presence turns into perception by implementing imagination and reflection, which has a noetic function. In other words, feeling, if it is not mere presence, must be reflective.

Less abstractly put, when we experience a painting aesthetically we try to come to grips with what it expresses. As we have seen, the expression of the aesthetic object is not

[82] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology,* 392.
[83] Ibid., 416.
[84] Still, this is not rational knowledge, but affective knowledge.

always clearly given. Our act of trying to make sense of it, what we previously described as 'leveling' with the object by being-in-depth, is to feel actively or attentively. "Thus," Dufrenne writes, "immediate feeling is not all of feeling. Authentic feeling must be earned, just as (and because) perception must be gained gradually."[85] As we will see in chapter two, feeling is not merely immediate, but always furnished with what we know of the object, and our training of perception. To be fully present to the work involves a trained perception. In other words, some works of art demands a trained perception, and maybe knowledge of a certain historical style. But this is so only to the extent that it gives a clearer and more intimate perception of the aesthetic object. Knowledge of the object can but prepare us for perception, not replace it. We see now that reflection is involved in aesthetic perception by a form of sympathetic reflection, always trying to make perception more clear. There is a constant oscillation between feeling and reflection, the one furnishing the other. Reflection prepares for feeling, while feeling appeals to and guides reflection. Thus, aesthetic perception culminates in feeling, although without omitting reflection.

We have seen in this brief overview of Dufrenne's description of the aesthetic object and the aesthetic perception, the close bond between the two. At the most extreme object-pole the aesthetic object demands our attention and expresses a world. At the most extreme subject-pole, aesthetic experience is to enter into a relation with the object by granting it attention, and reading its expression by means of feeling. Neither the aesthetic object, nor the aesthetic perception exist without the other, and aesthetic experience takes place only in, or through, their conjoining. Aesthetic experience is the spectator's reading of the expressed world of the aesthetic object. The fundamental unity between the expressive quasi subject and the spectator is what we will turn to next by leaving the phenomenological description, and entering the level of the transcendental analytic.

1.3. The a priori[86]

Briefly put, Dufrenne conceives of the a priori in a similar fashion as Immanuel Kant.[87] In Dufrenne's words, the a priori designates "the character of knowledge which is logically, not psychologically, prior to experience and which is both necessary and universal".[88] Contrary to

[85] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology*, 418.
[86] The a priori may be both singular and plural, depending on context.
[87] In addition to Dufrenne's description of the a priori given in *The Phenomenology,* 441-500, the present survey is based on Edward Casey's "Translator's introduction" in Dufrenne, *The Notion of the A Priori*, xviii-xxviii. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966).
[88] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology*, 442.

Kant, Dufrenne wishes to treat the a priori not only concerning the transcendental forms of intuition and the categories of reason (in Dufrenne's terms, the *formal* a priori), but also to the *material* a priori.[89] The material a priori designates the logical structures of the qualitative regions of human experience, such as social, bodily – and aesthetic – experiences. Similar to the a priori of understanding which conditions the possibility of understanding, the affective a priori conditions the possibility of aesthetic experience.

Dufrenne stresses a fundamental duality of the a priori, even though, in the end, the a priori is irreducible. In its objective aspects the a priori is that which constitutes an object as an object open for being experienced. This aspect Dufrenne terms the cosmological aspect of the a priori, while the existential aspect is that which constitutes the subject as a subject capable of experience.[90] A difference between Kant and Dufrenne concerns the existential aspect of the a priori. While the subjective aspect of Kant's a priori is the constitution of objects by a transcendental subject,[91] Dufrenne conceives of the subjective aspect as a concrete subject, bodily present in the world.[92] When we now speak of the subject of experience, it is the concrete subject, situated in the world as his body. This is an important aspect of Dufrenne's theory as he emphasizes on several occasions that the a priori only exist through the a posteriori. The a priori is a logical construct that enables us to understand the a posteriori. The a priori never exist *in itself*, so to say, outside its realization a posteriori. The a priori must be made manifest. Nevertheless, the a priori can be known as an object of knowledge which itself is a priori. In relation to the aesthetic experience Dufrenne conceives of *affective qualities* as such knowledge, which I will return to further down. The distinction between the cosmological and existential aspects of the a priori will also be clearer when we now turn to the a priori of aesthetic experience – the affective a priori.

[89] The material a priori was also the concern of other phenomenologists such as Husserl, Scheler and Merleau-Ponty. Edward Casey, "Translator's Foreword to the New Edition," in Dufrenne, *The Notion of the A Priori*, xxix-xxxii. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966), xxix.
[90] Concerning experience, the cosmological aspect of the a priori of experience conditions the object of experience as a possible experienced object. The existential aspect conditions the subject as capable of experience. In Kant's terms "The *a priori* conditions of a possible experience in general are at the same time the conditions of the possibility of objects of experience." Kant quoted in Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology*, 442.
[91] Casey, "Translator's introduction" in Dufrenne, *The Notion of the A Priori*. xix.
[92] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology*, 437. This difference is somewhat reminiscent of Merleau-Ponty's critique of Husserl, mentioned introductory (0.3.3.), who claimed that a complete reduction aiming at the transcendental ego is never possible.

1.3.1. The affective a priori

Briefly put, the affective a priori designates the universal and necessary unity between the aesthetic object and aesthetic perception. This unity makes explicit that the aesthetic experience is a necessary *conjoining* of subject and object, and that it cannot be reduced to either part. The a priori is, as we have seen, both cosmological and existential. As cosmological it constitutes the aesthetic object as an object/quasi-subject capable of expressing a world. As existential it constitutes the perceiving subject as subject, capable of feeling the expressed world. This means that while the cosmological a priori constitutes the being of the world of the aesthetic object, the existential a priori determines the way the subject must relate to the object in order for it to be experienced aesthetically at all. Said in a different way, the existential a priori is the condition for the affective quality to inhabit the perceiving subject, while the cosmological a priori is the condition for the affective quality to be expressed through the object. They are mutually dependent and in the end one. However, as Dufrenne writes, the a priori is "anterior to both subject and object, constituting them both".[93] This is because neither has priority over the other; The subject alone does not constitute the object, nor does the object alone make the subject exist. Rather, as we have seen, both subject *and* object must be conjoined if aesthetic experience is to take place.[94]

But what is the affective a priori then, if it is, as we just said, anterior to both subject and object? The world of the aesthetic object is structured by an affective *category*, and this affective category acts as the a priori of the expressed world.[95] As we will see, the affective categories are aspects of Being.[96] As an aspect of Being, the affective a priori denotes the fundamental unity that must underlie any differentiation between subject and object. What does this mean, exactly, concerning aesthetic experience? Dufrenne argues that in order to experience aesthetically, the subject must have a *virtual* knowledge of affective categories. And in correlation, the expressive world of the aesthetic object must express an affective quality. What are virtual knowledge, affective qualities and categories?

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[93] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology*, 453.

[94] Dufrenne emphasizes that this takes place on all three levels of aesthetic perception: bodily presence, representation and feeling. I will focus on the latter as it is the most prominent, despite the fact that it always include both presence and representation, as we saw in 1.2.1.

[95] Dufrenne makes this point by referring to Max Scheler who, according to Dufrenne, holds that "A good does not result from the addition of a value to a preexisting thing but instead is incarnated in a thing and constitutes the thing as a good by this very act of incarnation." Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology*, 447. Similar, the affective a priori does not impose affectivity on the aesthetic object. Rather, when perceived aesthetically, the affective of the aesthetic object is incarnated in the object, which then constitutes it as an aesthetic object.

[96] To be further explained in 1.3.2.1.

The a priori does not only designate the logical conditions for that which we are (as the constitution of subject and object), but also a form of knowledge that we have before ever gaining it in experience. Dufrenne argues that we know of space before we have any explicit understanding of geometry, and this knowledge, albeit an implicit knowledge, is a priori knowledge. It is henceforth clear that what is meant by virtual or implicit knowledge is in no way the same as rational, explicit knowledge. The a priori, that is, the virtual or implicit knowledge of the subject, is rather an aspect of our being as humans. But while the experience of space is dependent on a virtual knowledge of space,[97] in the case of aesthetic experience, the subject must have a virtual knowledge of affective categories such as the tragic, the serene, the bleak and so on.[98] As I will return to in chapter two, this is just to say that in order to grasp expression, we must be *capable* of reading expression through feeling. To be capable means that we must possess the ability to feel, that is to possess the virtual knowledge of affective categories, in order for expression to take place.

However, what is expressed by the aesthetic object is not the general idea of affective categories, but a singular affective quality. The singular affective quality is what is felt in each and every, hence singular, aesthetic *experience*. But how can this infinite amount of singular aesthetic qualities be conceived through the general idea of affective categories? The relation is that of the a priori to the a posteriori. As we have seen, Dufrenne argues that the a priori only exist through the a posteriori. The tragic (as an a priori affective *category*) does not exist except in its realization as the singular tragic (as an a posteriori affective *quality*) *of* the aesthetic object. This defies any platonic idealism, as the tragic (as affective category) only designates the a priori, and thus the virtual or implicit, knowledge necessary for the tragic (as affective quality) to be felt.

But how can the aesthetic *object* express an affective quality? Again, we return to the phenomenological creator, who attests to the aesthetic object as a created object. As we saw in 1.1.2., the aesthetic object expresses a world on behalf of its creator, regardless of who the actual, historical creator was. All we know of the historical creator is through the aesthetic object. In order for the quasi subject to be expressive, the relation between the creator and the

[97] Reminiscent of what we saw in 1.2.1., the pre-objective presence of space is significant for us, and we cannot conceive of it as such, Dufrenne argues, if we do not possess the possibility for conceiving it. At the subjective pole, this possibility *is* a virtual knowledge, which is a priori knowledge.

[98] It is important to remember that the affective categories, as the a priori itself, are always implicitly dual, both a category for a subject and a world.

work of art must be similar to the one between the spectator and aesthetic object.[99] For the creator expresses in his creation an affective category *through* a singular affective quality. Again, regardless of who the creator was, the aesthetic object is neither a pure object, nor a pure subject, but a quasi subject. The 'quasi' indicates the fact that the aesthetic object works as a proxy for its *historical* creator. This is not to say that the creator simply "take thoughts and feelings, process them as images and effects and deliver them back to us for our appreciative amazement"[100] as Hal Foster puts it. That would be, according to Dufrenne, an example of inauthentic creation, and a view on art that reduces an irreducible aspect of our humanity to nothing.[101] Rather, as we saw in 1.1.1. the authentic creator imposes some of his personality, or rather, some part of his humanity in the work of art. It is not merely a question of depicting a tragic motive in order to express the tragic. Nor is it a question of following objective rules for evoking this or that effect. A trained eye will easily reveal such superficial attempts, Dufrenne argues. Rather, the creator must employ his depth in his creation, and by doing so he will set in action his virtual knowledge of the affective categories. And therefore, only by being truly subjective, by employing the most singular of his being – his depth – can the affective quality of the aesthetic object express the affective category, of which it is a token. In this sense, Dufrenne argues, the affective categories are truly human categories, as they designate the way in which the creator relates to his world. In creation, as we have seen (1.1.2.), some of this atmosphere, or *Weltanschauungen*, is incarnated in the work of art. And in this sense, the expression of the aesthetic object is truly anthropomorphic.[102] The aesthetic object is, as expressing a world, a sign of the human. The world of the aesthetic object is a human world. But this world is nothing but the unfolding of the sensuous, structured by an affective category. Hence, Dufrenne writes,

> To feel is to experience a feeling as a property of the object, not as a state of my being. The affective exist in me only as the response to a certain structure in the object. Conversely, this structure attests to the fact that the object is for a subject and cannot be reduced to the kind of objectivity which is for no one.[103]

[99] This is *not* to say that the experience of the creator and the experience of the spectator is similar. For an affective quality to be expressed, according to Dufrenne, there must be an a priori relation governing the act of creation in the same manner as the aesthetic experience of the spectator.
[100] Foster, "Post-Critical," 7.
[101] This is of course a crucial point in Dufrenne's theory, and a make or break for the whole system. I will return to this in various ways in all the next chapters.
[102] "As a consequence, the affective qualities into which the atmosphere of an aesthetic object is resolved become anthropomorphic." Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology,* 442.
[103] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology,* 442.

In other words, it is through the objective structure of the work of art that the aesthetic object expresses. This structure is only discernible to a critical reflection on the object, but is immediately *felt* in aesthetic experience. The a priori is therefore not mystical, nor spiritual, it is rather the possibility of experiencing the aesthetic object as expressive. To read expression is to know the expressed world of the aesthetic object. And this expressed world implies the (phenomenological) creator, which constitutes the aesthetic object as a quasi subject.

We have now seen that aesthetic experience is to know, or rather to feel, the expressed world of the aesthetic object. And the possibility of such feeling is conditioned by the affective a priori, which is anterior to both subject and object, constituting them both. By being anterior to both subject and object, the a priori belongs to Being. Being is what makes the affinity between subject and object possible, being the unity that presupposes them both. The expressive world of the aesthetic object is a human world, for it is expressing an affective category, which is a human category. Neither animals, nor nature, nor mere objects can express themselves aesthetically. But can they not be possible aesthetic objects, nevertheless? In order to find out, we have to discuss whether or not the aesthetic object and its significance is true.

1.3.2. Truth

Dufrenne uses the word truth in several ways. First there is the rational, objective truth, which we may say is the ordinary sense of the term. It's the truth of science, which seeks to give a sufficient representation that is in correspondence with the repeated observance of the real. Then there are two principal senses of the truth of the aesthetic *object*. Lastly, there is the truth of the *significance* of the aesthetic object, which is, as we will see, similar to, but also different from objective truth. The conclusion Dufrenne proposes is that aesthetic experience is true because it illuminates the real. For this reason *art* is serious and important, and strictly separated from diversion. But both the real and art is subordinated to Being since, as we saw in 1.3.1., the affective a priori is anterior to both aesthetic object and aesthetic experience, belonging to Being. This gives aesthetic experience an ontological significance; Aesthetic experience is in other words a revelation of an aspect of Being.

In order to understand each step towards this conclusion I would like to start with explaining the three terms Being, the real and world, which are crucial to any understanding of Dufrenne's conception of aesthetic truth. Then I will continue to discuss the two truths of the aesthetic object, and finally the truth of the significance of the aesthetic object.

1.3.2.1. Being, the real and world

The three terms Being,[104] the real and world are separate but interrelated. We have already seen that world, in relation to the aesthetic object, designates the aesthetic object's ability to express an inner organization of time and space. We said that this type of world is different than the regular world of ordinary perception, but what is this world, is it the real world? No, according to Dufrenne, there are several worlds. The way we often think of *the* world is in terms of the world of the natural sciences. This is also *a* world, it is but an objective representation of the real. Through scientific knowledge, this world has an impersonal being, which makes it intersubjectively available to anyone who knows the theories of science. Nonetheless, it is a world only for consciousness. When we speak of *the* world from now on, it is not the objective world of science, but the *real* world in which man lives. Dufrenne terms this "the horizon of all horizons."[105] It is the background out of which our own horizon stands out. In ordinary life, we have *our* worlds, or rather, I have *mine* world, *my* horizon. My world is my perspective, in which, to say it with Merleau-Ponty, "I am the absolute source."[106] Every consciousness is the absolute source of its own world. This is not to return to Cartesian solipsism, rather it is the explication of the fact that even though I live in *the* world which is *already there*, it is already there *for me.* How I experience my world is based on how I make sense of the real. The real world is neither order nor chaos, but it is "an inexhaustible matrix of significations."[107] The real is the overflowing magnitude of everything around us. To form some sort of unity of the real is to form a world. But we can never grasp the real itself as a unity, because there is no real 'itself'. The real world is the possibility of the innumerable worlds, and not a world pre-existing its human counterpart. This is a very important point for Dufrenne, for this indicates that every world (understood as a subjective horizon) and even the real world (understood as the horizon of all horizons) are *human* worlds. The world is an ordering of the real world, by humanity. Thus everything that we perceive, think about or relate to is, in the deepest sense, according to humanity. It is a world in which man belong.

But neither the real, nor the worlds are the most fundamental aspect of what there is. Both presuppose a deeper affinity, or unity which constitutes them. This unity Dufrenne designates by the word Being. Being is what there is, and through that which is, is. It is what makes possible both worlds and the real, indicating the fundamental unity between them. As

[104] I have chosen to capitalize 'Being' in order to indicate the ontological meaning.
[105] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology*, 147.
[106] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, lxxii.
[107] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology*, 531.

Dufrenne puts it "Man and the real both belong to Being."[108] It is the supreme ontological term, but it is beyond the scope of this thesis to go into further detail.[109] Before proceeding to the relation between aesthetic experience, the real and Being, we have to see how Dufrenne understands the truth of the aesthetic object.

1.3.2.2. Two senses of the truth of the aesthetic object

In short, the two ways the aesthetic object may be true is (one) in relation of the *work* to itself, and (two) in relation to its creator. Considering the first, the aesthetic object is true when the *work* is governed by formal necessity, it must be a finished whole. It is true, Dufrenne writes, "because nothing in it rings false, since it fully satisfies perception."[110] This is maybe all the more clear if we compare the true aesthetic object with the untrue. Examples of the latter may be a pictorial composition which is unbalanced; in music, a note out of place; in literature, excess of words. How do we judge this? As we have seen, it is only for perception to decide. The genuine work of art imposes itself on us as an aesthetic object, being a rigorous ordering of the sensuous. But if this is nothing more than sensuous rigor, it is empty (again, just pure sense impressions). The very ordering of the sensuous, which in turn is the aesthetic object, must be "the sign of some other rigor,"[111] namely the rigor of the creator. By being a true structuring of the sensuous, it is made expressive.

Considering (two), the aesthetic object is true, when it is the product of an authentic act of creation. As we saw in 1.3.1., the creator must create in terms of what he is, in the deepest sense. He must apply his depth as a human being, and by doing so he "acts as a delegate of humanity."[112] Authentic creation is in this sense *true* creation. In the end, we get that these two senses of truth are not in any way separate. The formal necessity of the aesthetic object complements an *inner* necessity, which is the presence of the (phenomenological) creator. Thus, Dufrenne writes, the aesthetic object is true by double necessity, both formal and inner. The result of true creation is the true aesthetic object. But also conversely, the result of the true aesthetic object is its creator. The creator is true, only

[108] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology,* 547. My capitalization of 'Being'.
[109] Note that Dufrenne writes "We cannot take up here the question of whether ontology excludes or presupposes theology." Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology,* 547n. This is interesting as Dufrenne was an outspoken atheist. (According to *Perspective,* Vol. 9 Jan/Feb, (Toronto: Institute for Christian Studies Institutional Repository, 1975), 2). However, in 1974 his second wife, and former student, Marcelle Brison wrote the book, *Expérience religieuse et expérience esthétique*, (Montreal: Presses De L'Univeristé Montreal, 1974) discussing Dufrenne's theory of aesthetic experience and religious experiences, which indicates a possible affinity between the two.
[110] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology*, 504.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid., 503.

insofar as he is in a true relation to his work. Therefore, the work creates the creator as much as the creator creates the work. This indicates what we saw in 1.3.1., for if neither the creator, nor the work has priority over the other, there must be some presupposed affinity between them. This is, as we saw, the affective a priori. Thus, the expressed world (which is structured by the affective categories, expressing an affective quality), "transcends the subjectivity of the individual who expresses himself in it."[113] In other words, the aesthetic object is true, because the world it expresses reveals the affective a priori. But one question remains if we are to establish the value of the aesthetic experience that makes its significance go beyond the internality of the aesthetic experience. What is the relation between the world of the aesthetic object and the real world?

1.3.2.3. The aesthetic object, the real and the ontological signification

We have already said that the expressed world of the aesthetic object is a true world, because it reveals the a priori. But to finally establish the truth of the aesthetic object we have to ask whether the affective a priori is kept for the aesthetic object, or whether we may find it in our relation to the real world as well? We have to leave the point of the creator, and again turn to the expressivity of the object as we experience it in aesthetic experience.

According to Dufrenne, objective truths are established when they corresponds to the real. In other words, objective truths demonstrate the real. Similarly, Dufrenne proposes, the aesthetic experience *displays* the real, but in an entirely different manner. The most obvious way of conceiving the relation between the aesthetic object and the real would be by an examination of representation. But this is insufficient, according to Dufrenne, by the fact that imitative art abolishes the most real aspects of the real, namely "the surprising, the unforeseeable, everything which disconcerts to the point of urging a radical change of attitude."[114] Moreover, several works of art are not imitative, such as abstract paintings, or most works of architecture. The aesthetic object is not true on behalf of its mimetic character towards the real. Rather than producing or copying the real, Dufrenne writes, "the aesthetic object *says* the real and thus discovers it."[115] What is expressed through the world of the aesthetic object is *a meaning* of the real. This is not the *reality* of the real, which is the aim of the natural sciences, but the affective dimension of the real. What is revealed in aesthetic expression is in other words the very expressiveness of the real itself. Contrary to the world of

[113] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology*, 503.
[114] Ibid., 513.
[115] Ibid., 516.

science, which is impersonal, the world of the aesthetic object is singular. But as we saw in 1.3.2.2., the singular affective quality of the aesthetic object, transcendends itself as a sign of the affective categories, which are the a priori structure of affectivity as such. So, as the aesthetic object expresses a world, *as if* it was a subject, it expresses a unity of the real. It orders the real, not by way of representation, but by expression. This world, in so far it is true, expresses, or rather, illuminates the real. Therefore, the aesthetic object has a noetic function, by showing us an aspect of the real, namely its expressive character. As we shall discuss in more depth in chapter three, the aesthetic object *bears* on the real itself and illuminates the real, therefore it is true.

Through the examination of the aesthetic object as a privileged object of aesthetic experience, we come to the fact that the real has an affective character. This goes back to what we wrote earlier (1.1.1.), that in theory, *any* object may be perceived aesthetically. Nonetheless, *art* is privileged in this sense, because the aesthetic object that stems from it is an object which purposes lies solely in this perception. Contrary to any object of use, of nature or living being, the aesthetic object *of art* does not solicit anything but perception. And through this (aesthetic) perception we undergo "the absolute experience of the affective."[116]

In the end, aesthetic experience has an ontological significance. Both art and reality are subordinate to Being, and the aesthetic experience reveals that the affective belongs neither to the real, nor to the subject. Rather, it belongs to Being. Thus, even though art has no purpose for its creation, it has a function. Its function lies in teaching man to experience the affectivity of the real. This is not to say that we experience the world as expressive only in so far as we have experienced art on beforehand. Quite to the contrary, as the affective is *a priori*, it is a fundamental aspect of the relation between man and the world. As a priori the aesthetic experience is not something we may learn from one day to the other, it is implicit in our constitution as existing human beings. It is an irreducible factor of being human. However, as we saw earlier, the a priori exists only through the a posteriori. The a priori needs an occasion for its actualization in order to take place. The aesthetic experience of works of art are such occasions. The aesthetic experience of art makes us aware of the attitude we have to intake towards the object in order to make its possible expression flourish. Of course, as we made explicit earlier (1.3.1.), the affective a priori is both existential *and* cosmological. There must be some rigorous structure in the object which makes it expressive. In this survey we have seen how Dufrenne describes the aesthetic object of art, but the

[116] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology,* 542.

structures of the aesthetic object of nature, of artifacts or of living beings are not the themes of *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*.[117] The aesthetic experience of art makes us sensitive to the real, it makes our existence richer and in a more intimate contact with our surroundings. In Dufrenne's terms, "Art is what allows us to rediscover the freshness and power of persuasion which are intrinsic to seeing. Art leads us back to beginnings."[118] Art is important because it is true.

1.4. Conclusion

In this reading of Dufrenne's *The Phenomenology*, I have highlighted the main themes of the theory. As we have seen, Dufrenne conceives of the aesthetic object as separate from the work of art, being the work of art as perceived for its own sake. The aesthetic object expresses a world which is structured by an affective category, itself a priori in character. Aesthetic perception culminates in feeling, although without omitting reflection. Feeling is to read the expressed world of the aesthetic object, which is conditioned possible by a virtual knowledge of the affective categories. The aesthetic experience may be conceived logically by the affective a priori, which is anterior to both subject and object and therefore belonging to Being. The aesthetic object bears on the real world by expressing affectivity, which is true because it illuminates the affective aspect of the real. As aesthetic experience is a revelation of the affective aspects of the real, and since the affective is a priori in structure, aesthetic experience is a revelation of an aspect of Being.

Before proceeding to the next chapter, some general remarks to Dufrenne's theory are appropriate. There are three important themes of aesthetics that Dufrenne mentions but which is of no central concern in *The Phenomenology*. These are the question of the *historicity* of aesthetic experience, the idea of aesthetic *pleasure*, and the notion of *beauty*. Taking the latter first, beauty is in fact explicitly mentioned several times throughout *The Phenomenology*, but I have chosen to save it until the end for matters of clarity. For Dufrenne, beauty denotes two things. First, it may be an affective category, similar to the sublime, the tragic, the serene and so on. In this sense it is an affective a priori, which structure both the expressed world of the aesthetic object, and simultaneously being the virtual knowledge evoked in aesthetic feeling. Secondly, beauty is a value. Beauty is the name of what is aesthetically true, and it corresponds to what we called in 1.3.2.2. the first sense of the truth of the aesthetic object. In

[117] As mentioned in footnote 13 in the introduction, Dufrenne describes the aesthetic experience of nature in his later article "The Aesthetic Experience of Nature," and in *Le Poetic.*
[118] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology,* 542-543.

other words, only a beautiful aesthetic object may express a world, even though the affective quality it expresses is devoid of beauty. Concerning aesthetic pleasure, Dufrenne does not write much. In the introduction he writes,

> If we describe [the aesthetic experience] as a feeling of pleasure, there is no assurance that this feeling is always experienced or even that a judgment of taste is always pronounced; and, if it is pronounced, it is often at the edge of our contact with the work of art and pronounced only in order to express preferences which, to be honest, we know are subjective and which decide nothing whatever about the being of the work. Can we not construct an aesthetics which lays aside value judgments and accords to those valuations which are immanent in the spectator's experience only the limited importance they deserve?[119]

In other words, for Dufrenne, aesthetic experience is not reducible to an experience of pleasure. Pleasure pertains to our subjective preferences, and is therefore devoid of any universal value. Contrary, aesthetic experience has value because it is true, because through it, Being is revealed. However, aesthetic experience may be pleasurable, but not universally. Kant saw aesthetic judgment exactly as our feeling of pleasure pertaining to the free play of the faculties of imagination and understanding.[120] To the contrary, Dufrenne conceives of aesthetic pleasure as a *bodily* pleasure, but "more refined and discreet that that which accompanies the satisfaction of organic needs."[121] However, the main point remains, aesthetic experience is not *essentially* an experience of pleasure.

This point relates to question of the historicity of aesthetic experience. As we have seen, Dufrenne conceives of the logical structure of the aesthetic experience as universal and necessary. However, this does not mean that the aesthetic experience *itself* is universal and necessary. In other words, for Dufrenne, aesthetic experience is *not* normative. Different spectators may have different experiences of the same object. The spectator is, as we have already emphasized, a concrete, historical subject. Always imbedded in culture and society. Different cultures hold different objects as works of art. And most cultures and ages do not have a corresponding concept of art as we do in modern, Western Europe. But does this mean that other cultures do not have aesthetic experiences? And if they do, are "their" aesthetic experiences different to "ours"? To Dufrenne, these are superficial divides. Even though the *objects* of aesthetic experience are different throughout cultures, ages and for different persons – the same structure governs the experience, namely the affective a priori. And this is

[119] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology*, lviii.
[120] Immanuel Kant, "Fra *Kritikk av Dømmekraften* (1790)," in *Estetisk Teori: En Antologi*, Kjersti Bale and Arnfinn Bø-Rygg (Ed.), 56-93, (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2008), 66-67.
[121] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology*, 339.

exactly what makes the affective a priori an a priori, that it is a fundamental structure of the relation between man and world, not between man and his culture. By transcending the limits of cultures and ages its constitution lies in Being. Furthermore, as was emphasized in the introduction (0.2.) Dufrenne chose to treat the aesthetic experience of the work of art as an *exemplary* aesthetic experience, not *the only* aesthetic experience. This is so, because he conceives of the work of art as a privileged object in this matter. It is privileged, because its telos lies in its realization in aesthetic experience. However, it is obvious that this is not true of much contemporary art today. Yet, I do not think that the affective dimension of the work of art cannot be dismissed altogether. As I will argue in chapter five, the affective dimension is *one* of the ways works of art may convey sensuous significance that cannot be reduced to the objective being of the work, nor to its socio-cultural context.

However, in the next chapters of this thesis I will discuss three aspects of Dufrenne's theory, namely the notion of aesthetic experience in relation the empathy (chapter two), the notion of aesthetic truth (chapter three), and finally the relation between the a priori structure of aesthetic experience and its socio-cultural context (chapter four).

Two | Aesthetics and Empathy

2.0. Introduction: Aesthetics and empathy

In this chapter I will discuss Dufrenne's theory of aesthetic experience in light of the notion of empathy.[122] As we saw, the aesthetic object functions as a proxy for its creator, whose world we experience through feeling. Significantly, Dufrenne writes, "and it is *into* this world that we penetrate by means of feeling."[123] Furthermore, "there is something *in* the object that can be known only by *a sort of sympathy* in which the subject *opens himself to* it."[124] Both quotes emphasizes that the spectator must actively engage with the aesthetic object by *feeling into*[125] the object – even sympathizing with it. As we shall see, Dufrenne discusses the difference between understanding human gestures and the aesthetic object, claiming that a difference lies in the fact that the aesthetic object expresses subjectivity while upholding its objectivity. However, even though the objects of experience are different (subject vs. quasi subject), if the reading of (aesthetic) expression by means of feeling is structured by the affective a priori, and this reading is the *same* as we employ when we understand human gestures, does this imply that empathic experience is structured by the same a priori? If so, what separates the feeling involved in aesthetic experience and in empathic experience? And finally, what separates aesthetic experience as such, and empathic experience? Is aesthetic experience empathy?

In the following I will give an account of phenomenologist Max Scheler's understanding of empathy and sympathy, as Dufrenne refers to his theory when discussing feeling. I will then continue to the psychologist Simon Baron-Cohen's terms *cognitive* and *affective* empathy. Both accounts, I will argue, will help to illuminate Dufrenne's term feeling. Furthermore, I will return to Dufrenne's understanding of aesthetic experience and the reading of gestural expression, claiming the identity between empathy, in a broad sense, and feeling. I will then propose three decisive objections to the possible identity between aesthetic and empathic experience

[122] I will qualify my understanding of the word empathy further down.
[123] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology*, 415. My italics.
[124] Ibid., 442. My italics.
[125] The word 'empathy' was invented by Edward B. Titchener in 1909 as a translation of the German word 'Einfühlung,' which literary means feeling-in. The earliest occurrences of the word are to be found in romantic, German writers such as Herder and Novalis. It became widely known through the aesthetic theories of Theodor Lipps, who claimed that empathy is our ability to feel into works of art. However, Lipps understood empathy by what was to be called the argument by analogy, towards which, as we will see, Dufrenne is very dismissive. A. Pionotti, "Empathy," in *Handbook of Phenomenological Aesthetics*, Hans Rainer Sepp and Lester Embree (Ed.), 93-98, (Dodrecht: Springer, 2010), 93.

2.1. Max Scheler: Empathy and sympathy[126]

Basically, Max Scheler[127] holds that empathy is our experience of emotionally understanding the expressive behavior of others, while sympathy adds care or concern to such an experience.[128] His theory is written in polemic to the understanding of empathy by what is called the argument from analogy. This view on empathy holds that when I see someone cry, I must recall that when I cry, I am sad. Therefore I can assume by analogy that the other also must be sad when crying.[129] Scheler rejects such an understanding of empathy, and has several objections. For us, the most important is that the argument from analogy presupposes that which it aims to establish. Since I am related to my own body in a different manner than how I am related to the body of the other, I must be able to see the behavior of the other as expressive *in the first place*, in order to deduce the similarity between the two. Moreover, the argument from analogy presupposes that we first perceive the other as a physical entity, which subsequently is given properties as a minded being. Scheler rejects this, claiming to the contrary that in the face-to-face encounter with the other, our experience of the other as a minded being predates our experience of the other as mere physical entity. The behavior of others is *immediately perceived as expressive*, and thus affective or emotional states are not private, but expressed in behavior. This does not imply that we have access to the thoughts and feeling of the other in the same way as the other himself. That would be to erase the divide between the perceiver and the perceived. Rather, there is a fundamental unity between the subject and the other that structures empathy. That is to Scheler, the a priori structure of emotions. This is to my understanding almost identical to Dufrenne's notion of the affective a priori, which I will discuss further down. Therefore, our ability to understand the expressive behavior of the other is an irreducible aspect of human life. However, mere empathic understanding of the other, without the addition of care or concern (and so turning empathy into sympathy), is ethically questionable to Scheler. In other words, to be able to comprehend

[126] The following survey of Scheler's understanding of empathy and sympathy is based on Dan Zahavi's reading of Max Scheler's *The Nature of Sympathy* in Dan Zahavi, "Max Scheler," in A. Johrift (Ed.), *History of Continental Philosophy III*, 171-186, (Edinburgh: Acumen Press, 2010). Dan Zahavi, *Subjectivity and Selfhood: Investigating the First-Person Perspective*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2008), 148-163.

[127] Max Ferdinand Scheler (1874-1928) was a prominent phenomenological philosopher. See Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement*, 268-305, for a discussion on Scheler's place in the history of phenomenology. See Zahavi, "Max Scheler," 184-186, regarding his influence on other phenomenologists.

[128] It must be noted that Scheler seldom used the word empathy [Einfühlung] himself. I chose to follow Zahavi's decision to use 'empathy' to designate what Scheler referred to when he wrote of a basic experience of others, which he saw as a presumption for sympathy. See Zahavi, "Max Scheler," 178n-179n.

[129] As I will briefly discuss in chapter four, Mitchell Green holds an analogical understanding of empathy in his article "Empathy, Expression and What Artworks Have to Teach," in *Art and Ethical Criticism*, Garry L. Hagberg, (Ed.), 95-122, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008).

the pain of the other, but not react to it by concern, is morally wrong. In order to expand our understanding of empathy, and the nuance between empathy and sympathy, we must turn from a phenomenology to a psychology of empathy.

2.2. Simon Baron-Cohen: Cognitive and affective empathy

In full awareness of the danger of implementing theory stemming from an empirical psychology in a philosophical thesis such as this, I chose to use some of psychologist Simon Baron-Cohen's insights in the present study.[130] Contrary to Scheler, Baron-Cohen holds that care, or concern is a fundamental part of empathy. According to him empathy is "our ability to identify what someone else is thinking or feeling, and to respond to their thoughts and feelings with an appropriate emotion."[131] However, he divides empathy into two stages, the cognitive and the affective. The first part of the definition, which, in my view, is congruent with Scheler's understanding of empathy, is for Baron-Cohen the cognitive stage. It defines our ability to understand the other, to gather data of the other's mind – and our ability to understand the other's bodily gestures. The second part, the affective empathy, is, in my view, similar to Scheler's understanding of sympathy. It makes us able to respond appropriately, that is, not towards the other, but subjectively. In other words, when we see an old man crying, by being fully empathic in Baron-Cohen's terms, we must not just register that the man expresses grief, we must at the same time be *affected* by his expression. This is not to say that we must take part in his grief, only that we must feel concern, or otherwise react appropriately, for his state of being.

The gain of using Baron-Cohen's model, contrary to Scheler's, is that it enable us to discuss the relativity of empathy. According to Baron-Cohen, empathy is not a constant state, to the contrary we must be able to switch it off sometimes. In the face of the terrors presented in the everyday news, in order to live our lives at all, we must be able to chose not to empathize with every person suffering all around the world. Not being able to do so is,

[130] There are apparent problems involved in the shift between psychology and phenomenology, most obvious regarding the question of method. While phenomenology is, as we have seen, a non-explanatory description of a phenomenon from the first-person point of view, the psychology of Baron-Cohen uses empirical studies which opens for different explanatory interpretations, from which a definition is deduced. However, the definition Baron-Cohen gives of empathy is, in my view, an accurate definition in close resemblance to Scheler's description. As we shall see, through his empirical studies Baron-Cohen provides insights that are not available through phenomenological method, but which nonetheless may enable us to further our understanding on the relation between aesthetic and empathic experience. The following survey is based on Simon Baron-Cohen, *Zero Degrees of Empathy: A new theory of human cruelty*. (London: Allen Lane, 2011). Simon Baron-Cohen (1954-) is Professor of Developmental Psychopathology at the University of Cambridge.

[131] Baron-Cohen, *Zero Degrees of Empathy*, 11.

according to Baron-Cohen, a sign of psychopathology. Conversely, not being able to empathize, either cognitively or affectively, or neither at all, are also signs of psychopathology. For our current purpose, the most important point is that for most people, under normal circumstances, empathy involves *both* the cognitive and affective stages. For the sake of our argument, we now have a sufficient clear picture of what empathic experience is like.

2.3. Dufrenne: Expression and empathy

As we now have seen, both Scheler and Baron-Cohen holds that empathic experience includes two aspects, what we may call *expressive behavior* and *empathic perception*. Furthermore, both argue that empathic perception has a dual aspect, including both empathy and sympathy, or cognitive and affective empathy. How does this relate to Dufrenne's understanding of expression and feeling?

The context for Dufrenne's discussion on expression is his writings on language. He claims that language is both speech and gesture. That is, both conveying a meaning through the use of words and by expressing the subject who utters himself. Contrary to speech (into which we shall go in no further detail), which uses symbols to express a semantic meaning, gesture is embodied expression. By the way the speech is uttered, the speaker expresses himself. What is expressed is immediately comprehended by the one who listens, whether it is anger, joy, sincerity or irony. Expression is, to Dufrenne, "the mode of revelation for whatever lacks a concept, since there are concepts only of objects."[132] Furthermore he writes that "the gesture is the true seat of expressiveness."[133] In other words, a bodily gesture, such as crying, is immediately comprehended as expressing either joy or sadness (or both). According to Dufrenne, such comprehension is feeling. Dufrenne never uses the word empathy, rather he uses the word feeling. Following Zahavi's argument concerning Scheler (7n, 2.1.), in my view we are entitled to conclude in a similar fashion that Dufrenne's notion of feeling is identical with empathy in Scheler's sense. This is so insofar as feeling designates the *basic pre-reflective understanding of other human beings and their behavior.* This may be qualified by Dufrenne's statement, "it is in terms of feelings that the original relationship of a human being with the world is elaborated and the ungraspable spontaneity of the for-itself is manifested. *Our ability to recognize* a for-itself is due to this capacity for expression."[134] At

[132] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology*, 131.
[133] Ibid., 134.
[134] Ibid., 130. My italics.

this level there is, in my view, nothing that separates Dufrenne's notion of feeling from Scheler's notion of empathy, nor from Baron-Cohen's notion of *cognitive* empathy.

However, Dufrenne lists two ways we might still miss comprehending the behavior of the other. First, the gesture itself may be unclear. We might not be sure whether the other is crying of joy or sadness. In such cases, it is no wonder that we may be confused. But this is no objection to the fact that feeling, for Dufrenne, is the most basic understanding we have of other persons. Secondly, we might not be fully able to comprehend the expressed behavior, pertaining to our own lack of feeling. This case is the more interesting for us, as it helps clarify Dufrenne's understanding of feeling. It may be the case that we are unable to understand the gesture of the other, either because we belong to different cultures, or that we in some other way fail to be responsive to the expression. Dufrenne makes an example out of the immature child's inability to comprehend sexual gestures.[135] In such cases we have not developed our capacities for feeling in a sufficient manner. Rather, we have to be able to

> reapprehend and re-create in our own terms the gestures of others in such a way that they find an echo in our behavior and are inscribed in our own universe. We understand directly others' experience after being made sensitive by our own experience, and we would remained closed off from others if nothing prepared us to accept their experience and live its meaning.[136]

This brings Dufrenne dangerously close to the argument from analogy. However, he rejects such an understanding of feeling just before this quote. Rather, the next sentence qualifies the statement: "There is no feeling [*sentiment*] without a sort of presentiment [*presentiment*]."[137] As this quote is from Part I of *The Phenomenology* and thus before the transcendental analytic, Dufrenne does not engage in the transcendental conditions for feeling at this point. However, if we recall that the feeling involved in aesthetic perception is dependent on virtual or implicit knowledge, does the statement above qualify us to say that feeling (as empathy) involves latent a priori knowledge of the affective in the same fashion as feeling (as aesthetic perception)? I believe so. Thus, we see again (as we saw in 1.5.) that the concrete, existential a priori conditions of feeling, that is, our ability to apply feeling in reading expression, is determinant of appropriate cultural background. But this is not to say that we must evoke a memory of our own past experience in order to understand the gesture of the other. Rather, our whole history of being, what we have seen Dufrenne calls depth, must be implicitly

[135] An example which he directly copies from Merleau-Ponty's reading of Scheler. See Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 190-191. And Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology*, 132.
[136] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology*, 133.
[137] Ibid.

present, furnishing our current experience. So far, we have seen that Dufrenne's notion of feeling is identical with empathy, in Scheler's terms and cognitive empathy in Baron-Cohen's terms. However, is feeling merely to register the expression of the other or does it also include sympathy/affective empathy?

Dufrenne does not write on this explicitly concerning our understanding of bodily expression, but reveals himself in discussing feeling concerning aesthetic experience. He writes that "the aesthetic object is [not] to be measured by the emotions it can arouse,"[138] but that feeling is an instrument of *knowing* the expressed world. However, such knowing is not, as we have seen, rational knowledge, but knowledge stemming from feeling – in Scheler's terms, empathic knowledge. However, Dufrenne writes, "*The feeling* [the aesthetic object] *awakens in us*, is a means of knowing this other world."[139] In other words, there is some sort of affective response by the subject involved in feeling. Again, concerning the feeling involved in aesthetic perception, Dufrenne writes,

> It is not necessary for a spectator at a comedy to feel the same merriment he would experience if he were really in the situation represented. It is sufficient for him *to have the feeling of the comic* and to laugh with a tranquil laughter which proceeds from knowledge and not from surprise. Feeling is pure because it is a capacity of receptivity, a sensibility to a certain world, and an aptitude for perceiving that world.[140]

And, concerning the opera *Tristan and Isolde* by Wagner,

> Although I am not led to the point of calling a doctor to attend Tristan, I am led far enough to be moved, to fear, to hope, to live with him in some sense.[141]

Both quotes emphasize the affective dimension of feeling. And finally, we may recall the earlier quote from 2.0. "There is something in the object that can be known only by *a sort of sympathy* in which the subject opens himself to it."[142] As Dufrenne refers to Scheler when he describes feeling much earlier in the book, I'm certain to conclude that the sympathy Dufrenne has in mind is identical to Scheler's. Feeling is not *merely* to know (cognitive empathy), but also, to a certain degree at least, to be moved (affective empathy). Feeling is to feel human behavior as something that concerns us, and therefore not merely to register whatever is going on. Thus, we may conclude that Dufrenne's term feeling can be taken to mean *both* empathy and sympathy in Scheler's terms, and *both* cognitive and affective

[138] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology*, 136.
[139] Ibid., 137. My italics.
[140] Ibid., 379. My italics.
[141] Ibid., 10.
[142] Ibid., 442. My italics.

empathy in Baron-Cohen's terms. But are aesthetic and empathic experience the same thing?[143] At this point of the argument it may seem so, as we have already seen that aesthetic perception is mainly to read the expressed world of the aesthetic object by means of feeling. However, there are at least three decisive differences, which we will turn to now.[144]

2.3.1. The aesthetic object is not a human subject

The most apparent difference between our experience of an aesthetic object and our understanding of the expressive behavior of the human subject, is that the aesthetic object, in most cases, is an inanimate object.[145] We saw introductory (0.2.) that Dufrenne chose to treat the aesthetic experience of the *work of art* as an exemplary aesthetic experience. As was discussed, this does not imply that it is the *only* aesthetic experience, just that works of art are taken to be privileged objects for such experience. We have seen that the aesthetic object for Dufrenne is conceived of as a quasi subject, and not a subject. This implies that every aesthetic object has a sort of objectivity to it that denies its being as a living subject. At the same time, there is some subjectivity present that denies its mere objectivity. In 1.1.2. we saw that the aesthetic object of the work of art expresses itself as a proxy for its creator. Now we may see the expressed world in light of the term gesture.

As we have seen, the human subject expresses himself by gestures, which Dufrenne considers as an unification of the signifier and the signified. The meaning of the gesture lies entirely in the gesture itself. Similar to the human gesture, the aesthetic object is a gesture made by its creator. But the aesthetic object and the creator are separated by an untraversable chasm. The aesthetic object of the work of art is a gesture removed from the one who performs the gesture. This is what is implied by the already mentioned separation between the *historical* and the *phenomenological* creator, and furthermore why the quasi subject is a *quasi* subject. This is a very important point in Dufrenne's theory. The separation between the creator and the work of art embedded in the aesthetic object, is what makes possible that the expression of the aesthetic object may transcend the individual person who expresses himself through creation. As the aesthetic object is, in one sense, an object, and therefore also always

[143] From now on I will use the word 'empathy' in a broad sense, to designate both 'empathy' and 'sympathy' in Scheler's terms, *and* 'affective' and 'cognitive empathy' in Baron-Cohen's terms.
[144] This is no attempt of an exhaustible list on the differences between aesthetic and empathic experiences. I'm only pointing at some decisive differences that helps to clarify Dufrenne's understanding of aesthetic experience.
[145] This, I believe, must be true even for our aesthetic experience of living beings. This is so, as we have seen that the aesthetic object is purely sensuous, and demands us to perceive it for its own sake. The aesthetic perception of living beings is then to perceive them for the sake of its sensuous appearance and therefore, in a sense, as an object. I will return to this further down.

in-itself-for-us, it has significance far beyond a *mere* bodily gesture. As it is objectified, we may return to it. And even though every experience of the aesthetic object is somewhat different, the object of experience has a lasting character as an in-itself, which permits our continuous re-experiencing of it.[146] This is something that we may never achieve in regular empathic experience.

We now see the true implication of what we saw introductory when stating that the aesthetic object is the work of art *perceived for its own sake*. This means that we must be attentive to the appearance of the work of art as it unfolds *in the sensuous*. As I will discuss in chapter four, this is the same as what Martin Seel elegantly describes as "attentiveness to a play of appearances."[147] However, the expressed world that is revealed in the sensuous is not something that is *hidden* in or behind the aesthetic object. Rather it is immanent in the very structure of the appearance. Expressive meaning *is* the meaning of the sensuous appearance itself. This is, exactly the same as Dufrenne's definition of the gesture as the unified signifier and signified. To sum up our first objection: The aesthetic object is a gesture that, contrary to the bodily gesture, is separated from its creator. This, in turns makes it possible that its expression transcends the expression of its creator. This last point we will return to in 2.6., but before that we will turn to objection number two.

2.3.2. The aesthetic experience is both feeling and reflection

A second difference between aesthetic and empathic experience is that the first is not solely feeling, but also reflection. This is not to say that we never reflect on our empathic experiences, only that such reflection is not essential to empathy. Contrary, it is, according to Dufrenne, essential to reflect on aesthetic experience, lest it be reduced to pre-reflective experience (as empathy basically is).[148] As we have already seen in 1.2.4., aesthetic perception culminates in feeling, but is always constantly oscillating with an indeterminate reflection. This reflection furnishes perception by trying to understand, or to translate, the expression in graspable terms. This, however, we have already seen in the end is impossible. Nonetheless, the inability to fully present what is experienced in feeling to understanding, is a sign of the inexhaustible character of the aesthetic object. The affective meaning expressed in

[146] There are of course aesthetic objects which are not enduring, such as a performance of music, a play or dance. However, they have the same ontological status as quasi subjects as they are nonetheless perceived objects expressive of a world. See Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology*, 19-37, concerning performance.
[147] Martin Seel, "The Aesthetics of Appearing," in *Radical Philosophy*, Vol. 118 March/April, (London: Radical Philosophy, 2003), 19.
[148] 'Basically' because we may indeed use reflection in order to understand the other's point of view. But this is not *the basic* way human beings relates to their environment, according to both Scheler and Dufrenne.

the sensuous may never be reduced to a linguistic equivalent. But is this not what we do when we denote the expressed world by an affective category such as the tragic or the sublime? No, Dufrenne writes – to use an affective category in order to evoke the singular affective category of the expressed world is *not* to denote or translate, but to *name* it. It can never be a substitute for the experience itself, but is furnishing our perception by always trying (although, in the end, inadequately) to understand it. Reflection is involved in aesthetic experience, but it only gets us so far. The apotheosis of aesthetic perception is still feeling. By its constant oscillation with reflection, aesthetic perception is more than mere presence, but not yet understanding. Both the first, and the second objection lead to the third, which we will turn to next.

2.3.3. The aesthetic experience lays claim to truth

Contrary to empathic experience, aesthetic experience lays claim to truth. Even though I believe we can agree that empathic experience must be said to convey truth of the other in some sense, this is not the sense of truth we have in mind. However, as we have seen that even though Scheler holds that empathy is to perceive the other's mind, this does not mean that every aspect of the other's mind is revealed through empathy. Experiences in the first-person is reserved for each and every subject themselves. The subject has therefore an inexhaustible character as a for-itself. Similar, the aesthetic object is inexhaustible in its own sense. But the aesthetic object is a gesture separated from its creator, and this gesture is only graspable in correlation to aesthetic perception. Again, we return to the notion of the affective a priori. This is so since the affective character of aesthetic experience is, as we have seen, anterior to both subject and object, while constituting them both. Returning to empathic experience, is a similar structure at play there? We have already said it to be so. But then, on the transcendental level, what separates aesthetic and empathic experience?

In my view, we may understand empathy as experience in accordance with the affective a priori. This is in accordance with the description of feeling given in 1.3.1. Since the angry gesture is its anger, and our empathic reading of it presupposes (by virtual knowledge) our ability to recognize it as such, empathic experience must have an a priori structure.[149]

What in the end separate empathic and aesthetic experience is that aesthetic experience reveals the a priori, while empathic experience is merely to live it. Aesthetic experience

[149] This is what has already been implied by identifying feeling with empathy.

presupposes living in accordance with the a priori, but it is not only to feel the expressed world, but also to know *that* we feel the expressed world. In other words aesthetic experience is to *know* – or to contemplate – the affective a priori. This is in accordance with what we saw in the two former objections. First, as we experience the aesthetic object as a gesture *separate* from its creator, its entire being lies in the sensuous. The affective meaning of the aesthetic object is in the unfolding of the sensuous, and according to Dufrenne, that is *why* we experience art – to witness the inexhaustible unfolding of the meaning immanent in the sensuous.[150] To witness this unfolding is to witness the unfolding of an actualization of the a priori. Secondly, by employing the indeterminate reflection of aesthetic perception, we are actively engaged in the very activity we are going through. This is not to say that we are reflecting upon our *act* of feeling, but that we are reflecting on what is felt, namely the affective dimension of the aesthetic object. It is more like attention than reflection. We strive to follow that which the aesthetic object expresses, its singular necessity through which it unfolds itself. Although, its expression is only available to "the logic of feeling,"[151] the reflection in aesthetic perception denotes the very *strife* to follow this logic. No such strife is involved in empathic experience, as the expressiveness of the gesture is immediately given in the gesture.

2.4. Conclusion

We have now seen that Dufrenne's notion of feeling is, in a broad sense, the same as empathy. Our understanding of empathy has been guided by Scheler and Baron-Cohen, who both emphasize the dual character of empathy, either by the separation of empathy and sympathy, or cognitive and affective empathy. The gain of identifying feeling with empathy was that it enabled us to discuss the differences and similarities between empathic and aesthetic experience. The major similarity is then the fact that feeling/empathy *is* the basic constituent of aesthetic perception, for Dufrenne. A possible problem with this view, though, is that it implies that only empathic persons may experience aesthetically. We shall return to this problem briefly in chapter five, and argue that a complete identification of feeling and empathy is impossible. I have proposed three distinct differences between empathic and

[150] "Therefore what is irreplaceable, the very substance of the work, is the sensuous or perceptible element [*le sensible*] which is communicated only in its presence; it is that fullness of the music into which I strive to be absorbed, that conjunction of color, song, and orchestral accompaniment whose every nuance I strive to grasp and whose every development I strive to follow. That is why I am at the opera tonight, (…) to experience an apotheosis of the sensuous." Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology,* 11.
[151] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology,* 180.

aesthetic experience. First, the object of experience is markedly different (subject vs. quasi subject). Second, although aesthetic perception culminates in feeling, contrary to empathy, it also involves reflection. And third, contrary to empathic experience, aesthetic experience lays claim to truth.

The final point is in my view the most crucial point for Dufrenne's thesis. The question of whether or not aesthetic experience may be true, decides whether aesthetic experience has a value above mere sensuous diversion. For this reason I will discuss Dufrenne's understanding of the concept of truth in the following chapter.

Three | Art and Truth

3.0. Introduction

In the previous chapter we saw that Dufrenne's understanding of aesthetic experience resembles empathic experience, but that it is nonetheless distinct. The major difference we found was that aesthetic experience lays claim to truth. In chapter one we saw that Dufrenne conceives of aesthetic truth as distinct from rational, objective truth – what we usually call truth by correspondence. Rather, aesthetic truth is the revelation of an aspect of Being, as it illuminates the real. The view that aesthetic experience lays claim to truth is essential to Dufrenne's view on the value of the aesthetic experience. He holds that the experience of art is not merely a more or less pleasurable act of entertainment and diversion, but a serious and important part of human life. But again must we ask, how can the aesthetic experience, which culminates in "the contemplation of the sensuous and the perusal of its expression,"[152] be true? What is aesthetic truth?

Heidegger's treatment of the relation between the work of art and truth is informative for us at this point. In his essay "The Origin of the Work of Art" he claims that "art is truth setting itself to work."[153] Is this the same as Dufrenne means when he claims that the aesthetic object is true? In this chapter I will present and discuss Heidegger's and Dufrenne's understanding of the concept of truth and how they relate art and truth.

3.1. Heidegger and "The Origin of the Work of Art"

Before we proceed to discuss the relation between art and truth, we must understand properly what Heidegger means both by 'art' and 'truth.' Concerning the former, Heidegger asks: What is the work of art? The answer is that it is a work made by an artist. But then what is an artist? Is he not an artist only *in relation* to his work? Is it not his work that gives him the status as artist? According to Heidegger, we cannot escape this circle, but we must rather allow us to "follow the circle."[154] Neither artist nor work has precedence over the other; rather, their relationship constitutes them both. Thus, Heidegger concludes, the origin of the work of art is not the artist, but 'art'. Art is the origin, both of artist and the art work. How

[152] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology*, 502.
[153] Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Albert Hofstadter, (Trans.), 15-86, (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 39.
[154] Heidegger, "The Origin," 18.

shall we understand this notion of art then, if art is, as we saw, "truth setting itself to work"?[155] For doing so, we must examine Heidegger's notion of truth.

3.1.1. Truth as alétheia

One of the central ideas in *Being and Time* was Heidegger's critique of the traditional conception of truth.[156] The traditional concept concerns judgments such as "The apple is red." If the apple *is* red, then the judgment is true. For Heidegger, there are no problems pertaining to judgments as such. They are indeed inevitable for human beings. The problem occurs by the primacy given to this conception of truth. It should not be called truth at all, Heidegger argues, but rather "agreement,"[157] or "correctness,"[158] as it holds that the essence of truth lies in the agreement between judgment and the object of judgment. According to Heidegger, the traditional conception is derivate of a more primordial, more fundamental truth. This is already implied by the fact that the apple must *be* red in order to be judged truthfully as such. On which ground is the apple revealed as such? We may even say that the apple must *in truth* be red. What is it for an apple to be red 'in truth'?

Heidegger understands truth by the Greek term *alétheia,* which means unhiddenness or unconcealedness. First of all, to name truth as unhiddenness implies that it is a process of revealing. To be unhidden is to come from the hidden into the open. Such a process is always historical, and therefore truth is always a *happening* of truth, and not eternal, nor ideal. By the example of the apple, the apple is truthfully red when it comes out in the open, and thus being-revealed as red. In "The Origin" Heidegger terms this openness as *the clearing*. But to enter into the clearing implies leaving a hiding place. This place, this pre-open being he denotes as the closed or the hidden. And that which stands forth *as* hidden he calls *earth*.[159] The earth is the solid hiddeness that is *always also present* in truth in so far as truth is to *step out* of the hidden. Thus truth is always also un-truth, that is, hiddeness. The apple's being red is truthfully so on behalf of other, that is the hidden, aspects of its being. This may be conceived trough another example.

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[155] Heidegger, "The Origin," 39.
[156] This subchapter is based on Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Trans.), (New York: Harper Perennial, 1962), §44, 256-273. And Heidegger, "The Origin."
[157] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 257.
[158] Heidegger, "The Origin," 52.
[159] "Earth is that whence the arising brings back and shelters everything that arises without violation. In the things that arise, earth is present as the sheltering agent." (Heidegger, "The Origin," 42). And "The earth is not simply the Closed but rather that which rises up as self-closing." (Heidegger, "The Origin," 55).

When the red apple is revealed, it stands forth in the clearing. When we cut it in two, the white inside of the apple is uncovered. Now, the whiteness of the apple comes out of the earth and stands forth in the clearing. However, keeping the apple unified is to let it belong to the earth, as the whiteness of the inside is kept hidden. This hiddeness, that is, un-truth, is *in* truth also when the apple is whole. The whole apple is red 'in truth,' and thus unhidden, but it still hides the whiteness (and other aspects), and therefore always also belongs to the earth. This does not mean that the apple is false when it is whole, as it covers up the inside of the apple. To Heidegger, the opposite of truth is not the false, the opposite to false is *correctness*. Truth is the primordial fundament for something to either *be* false or to *be* correct.

Furthermore, the clearing is not reserved for that which appears. To step into the clearing is to appear for someone, more specifically, for Dasein.[160] Truth, that is, unhiddenness, is always truth *for Dasein*. Thus, the apple is only *in truth* in so far as Dasein also is *in truth*. To sort things out, we may say that truth (as uncovering) is always a happening for Dasein. Dasein *is*, in this sense, the occurrence of truth. Truth comes into being only in, or through, Dasein, as uncovering is fundamental for the constitution of Dasein, in so far as Dasein *is* Being-in-the-world.[161] Echoing the theory of intentionality, we may say that truth is always truth *for someone*. And for Heidegger, this is not just anyone, but for the existing human being, i.e. Dasein. This point is fundamental, but does not, as it may seem, imply that truth is reduced to a *merely* subjective truth. Truth is truth only for Dasein, but is not constituted by Dasein alone. Heidegger exemplifies this with the fact that, even though Newton's laws became true only when they were uncovered, this does not imply that they were false before. It only means that their being *as true* were unhidden first when they came into the clearing, that is, when they were formulated by Newton. To be 'in truth' is to be 'in truth' for Dasein.

If we try to put it in other words we may say that: There is truth when a phenomenon appears in itself to a subject.[162] This is the same for any phenomenon, even a thought or a sentence. A judgment is 'in truth' when it is present for a subject. To be present is to be uncovered, and not to be present is to be hidden. But this is to simple. For to be present is

[160] Dasein, literary meaning *being-there*, is Heidegger's conception of the mode of being that is reserved for human beings. See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 65-77.
[161] The fundamental mode of being for Dasein is Being-in-the-world. The notion addresses the fact that a human being cannot be at all unless he is in relation to a world. For Heidegger, there is a fundamental unity between world and human, conceived of in the notion of Dasein *as* Being-in-the-world. See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §12, 78-86.
[162] See the introduction 0.3.2. on Husserl's notion of phenomenon. Heidegger is somewhat different by claiming that the phenomenon is "that which shows itself in itself." (Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 54). See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §7A, 51-55, on the concept of the phenomenon and appearance.

always to be present on behalf of something else, thus always keeping this 'something else' in the background – that is, hidden. To be in truth is therefore to be in the process of becoming present. By intending a phenomenon, it stands out from the earth and into the clearing. And when we intend something else, the former phenomenon will be drawn back into the earth. Thus, truth is uncovering. But what is uncovered? Beings - that is any entity, in any ontical mode of being.[163] However, the process of uncovering itself, that is, truth as constituent of Dasein, belongs not to the ontical, but to the ontological. Truth is therefore an aspect of Being.

3.1.2. Truth in work

We have now seen what Heidegger means by truth, understood as unconcealedness and we are now ready to clarify the meaning of Heidegger's statement "art is truth setting itself to work."[164] Briefly, the work of art is "setting up a world and setting forth the earth."[165] Between the world and the earth there is a constant strife, and through this strife, truth is won. But what is meant with world, earth and strife?

A world for Heidegger is not an objective world, neither is it the total of things in the real. Rather it is the perspective that gives things their meaning. A world is disclosed meaning, the things as they are *for* Dasein, in the world *of* Dasein. It is apparent that Dufrenne is very inspired by Heidegger on this matter as there is on this level, in my reading of the two, no essential difference between their understanding of the notion of world (see 1.1.2. and 1.3.2.1. for Dufrenne's understanding of world), the difference lies, as we shall see, in shifts of emphasis.

For Heidegger, the concept of earth is as important as the concept of world. That the work of art sets forth the earth means that the work of art has an essential aspect as being-hidden. This is apparent, for instance, when conceiving the painting as a material object, as its materiality is never entirely devoured by the word that is set up. The world of the painting is a world only in a paradoxical contrast to the physical paint on the canvas. This duality, this paradoxical contrast between physical presence and a meaningful world Heidegger conceives of as a *strife* between world and earth. This strife is not hostile, but productive, both world and earth are mutually empowered by the strife. However, as we saw in 3.1.1. Heidegger

[163] The ontical is the mode of being of beings. The ontological is reserved for Being, which *constitutes* the being of all beings as such. Heidegger separates for instance between the ontical modes of the present-at-hand and the ready-at-hand. See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §3 and 4, 28-35.
[164] Heidegger, "The Origin," 39.
[165] Ibid., 49.

conceives of truth as the happening of an uncovering of something hidden. The strife between world and earth *is* such a happening of truth, in other words, truth happens *in* the work of art. Thus the statement that "art is truth setting itself to work,"[166] is not metaphorical, but concrete. Art is the presence of truth setting itself to work, in the work, as work. But what is revealed or uncovered by this truth of the art work? Heidegger writes that "the true is what corresponds to the real, and the real is what is in truth."[167] In other words, the real is uncovered in the work of art. Again, on this level, there is apparently no difference between Heidegger and Dufrenne. Both agree that art is an uncovering of the real world. Their disagreement lies, as we shall see, in what aspect of the real is revealed, and how.

Heidegger writes, "setting up a world and setting forth the earth, the work is the fighting of the battle in which the unconcealedness *of beings* as a whole, or truth, is won."[168] In other words, what is revealed by the work of art is the being of beings. Heidegger mentions, amongst others, two examples in "The Origin," the first concerning a painting of a pair of shoes by Van Gogh. What is revealed here is the equipmentality of the shoes represented in the painting.[169] Thus, the being of the shoes as equipment (in Dufrenne's terms, as an object of use) may be revealed through the work of art. The second example is that of a Greek temple, an example that is not representational, as the painting is. What is revealed by the temple is its being in truth. It opens up a world in which the temple has meaning, for the old Greeks it was the house of a god, a place for worship and celebrations. However, it is also there as something that shapes its surroundings. By letting the stone of the columns, the grass around the base, and the wind in the peristyle play together as an unity, its earth is set forth. The work lets the earth be earth. By the strife between the earth and world, the preservers [sic] (Dufrenne would say spectators) are witness to the becoming of truth of the temple as being.

We have already pointed at some similarities and contrasts between Dufrenne's and Heidegger's understanding of truth and art, but we have yet to fully understand what Dufrenne means by the concept of truth. Before we shall be able to fully comprehend what aesthetic truth is, and to appreciate its function, we must clarify what Dufrenne's conception of truth is. Is it the same as Heidegger's alétheia?

[166] Heidegger, "The Origin," 39.
[167] Ibid., 50.
[168] Ibid., 55. My italics.
[169] Equipmentality is the essence of the ontical mode of being-for-the-hand. The equipmentality of the equipment lies in its usefulness and reliability. (Heidegger, "The Origin," 34-35). This is much the same as what se saw in Dufrenne's analysis of the object of use in 1.1.1.

3.2. Dufrenne on the concept of truth

Strangely, Dufrenne does not write much on the concept of truth – strangely enough because the concept plays such a central role in his theory. However, one statement is quite informative. Dufrenne writes, "there is truth only through the discovery of a meaning which illuminates and transfigures the real and through the ability of a subjectivity to seize this meaning."[170] Thus, truth is not the appearance of the real as such, but the appearance of a meaning that illuminates it. How should we understand this? Truth is put in contrast with the appearance of brute reality, which according to Dufrenne only appears in boundary situations such as suffering, illness and death. We may recall what we saw in 1.3.2.1., that the real to Dufrenne is conceived of as "the horizon of all horizons," [171] and "an inexhaustible matrix of significations."[172] The real is the possibility of the worlds, both the objective, scientific world, and the subjective, lived worlds. Although we saw that the subject is the source of his own perspective, that is, his own world, the real is what guaranties the reality of this world. A contrast would be the world of fantasy. For Dufrenne, the real is always pre-objective, for in the moment it is objectified, it is formed into a world (see 1.2.1. on perception). But if truth is to discover a meaning which illuminates the real by a subject, is this not the same as forming a world? Not entirely, and here we may see a close resemblance between Dufrenne and Heidegger. I believe we may say that for Dufrenne there is truth only through the formation of a world. A subject is always in a relationship with his world, and through, or in, this world, truth happens. As Dufrenne writes, "The most inhuman reality is inhuman only for a human subject."[173] This is similar to what Heidegger says when truth happens only in relation to Dasein. Truth, then, is the discovery of meanings that illuminates the real.

But does this imply that the real is something far beyond and unavailable for the subject? As mentioned, Heidegger writes that "the true is what corresponds to the real, and the real is what is in truth."[174] At first it may seem that he and Dufrenne disagrees and that Dufrenne would uphold a strict dualism between the real as the unfathomable, and the world as the fathomable. Again, I think we should recall Dufrenne's statement that the a priori is only revealed through the a posteriori. This does not give precedence to the a priori, only that it is the transcendental conditions of possibility for the latter. Similarly, I think we should understand the real as the possibility of the worlds. Dufrenne holds that we are constantly in

[170] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology*, 531.
[171] Ibid., 147.
[172] Ibid., 531.
[173] Ibid.
[174] Heidegger, "The Origin," 50.

contact with the real, as it is always already there. In our discussion of Dufrenne's theory of perception in 1.2.1., we saw that the level of presence is taken to be the level of the given, not the known. It is the pre-objective unity of being-in-the-world that any distinction between subject and object presupposes. This is the most clear example of what Dufrenne means by his notion of the a priori. Although we have focused exclusively on the affective a priori, Dufrenne holds that there are a priori at work both at the level of presence and representation.[175] Roughly put, for there to be presence, there must be someone present (the existential a priori), and something to be present to (the cosmological a priori). When this a priori is realized in the a posteriori of the subject's experience of being in the world, and when the subject acts in accordance with this a priori, we may say that he acts in truth.

Now, it may seem that Dufrenne and Heidegger would agree. I take Heidegger's statement that "the true is what corresponds to the real," [176] to mean that the world which appears to Dasein is a true world, and as it corresponds to the real it is the real world. There is, in other words, not a more real world behind or before the true world of Dasein. Therefore, that "the real is what is in truth,"[177] does not mean that the real is exhausted in truth. To the contrary, the real can be revealed as such only *in truth*, that is, for Dasein. Similar, Dufrenne holds that the objective world of science is indeed a true world, but it is so only for the human subject who has knowledge of it. The facts of science demonstrate the real, explain it and make it intelligible. To discover scientific truth is, in Dufrenne's view, rightfully to discover "a meaning which illuminates and transfigures the real."[178] Can we at this point go so far as to identify Dufrenne's understanding of truth with Heidegger's alétheia? I believe that we can do so with some reservations. First, we should not underestimate the conceptual differences between Heidegger and Dufrenne. Heidegger emphasizes, as we have seen, that truth is also always un-truth, while Dufrenne focuses on the inexhaustibility of the real. Heidegger claims that truth is to uncover, while Dufrenne uses the word discover. Heidegger writes that the true is what corresponds to the real, while Dufrenne writes that the real is the possibility of a world, in which truth may be discovered. I think these differences show that a complete identification of the two concepts of truth is impossible. But since Dufrenne does not write more on the concept of truth in *The Phenomenology*, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to go into this in further detail. For the present purpose, however, the gain of identifying the two

[175] See, Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology*, 502. And Dufrenne, *The Notion of the A Priori*, 72-84.
[176] Heidegger, "The Origin," 50.
[177] Ibid., 50.
[178] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology*, 531.

concepts of truth enables us to discuss Dufrenne's and Heidegger's views on truth and art on equal grounds. For, secondly, as we will turn to next, there are some major differences on how the two relate truth to art.

3.3. Truth and Art

We have seen that according to Dufrenne, truth is for a subject to discover a meaning that illuminates and transfigures the real. We have seen that scientific truth may be such a truth when it uncovers a previously unknown aspect of reality and makes it available to the impersonal world of scientific knowledge. But for the present context we are interested in how truth relates to art. In chapter one we saw how Dufrenne emphasizes that our aesthetic experience of art must be true, lest it be reduced to mere diversion and entertainment. Let us take a brief look at what is at stake here.

3.3.1. Art and entertainment

As I will discuss further in chapter four, a common reply to aesthetic theories such as Dufrenne's is that they hold that aesthetic experience is pure luxury and entertainment, strictly separated from the serious business of politics and ethics, the spheres of action and choice. Dufrenne is fully aware of such possible critique of his theory and discusses this briefly.[179] For, by claiming that the aesthetic experience of art is a reading and a contemplation of the sensuous expression of an aesthetic object, is he not giving primacy to a passive form of entertainment suitable only for the privileged few? Dufrenne considers three possible arguments against such a view. First, the seriousness of the artist's creation and life may qualify the seriousness of art. Second, the importance of art throughout history may be proved by a sociological analysis. Thirdly, and most important, art is serious and important because it is true. This last argument is the only argument that may be valid from a phenomenological point of view, and the only argument that Dufrenne follows. We have already seen, in chapter one, that Dufrenne argues that the aesthetic object is true because the world it expresses bears on the real (and not the perceiving subject) and illuminates it. In the following we shall go in to this in some further detail, and contrast Dufrenne's view with Heidegger's.

[179] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology*, 501-503.

3.3.2. The world of the aesthetic object as true

We saw in chapter one (1.3.2.2.) that the aesthetic object may be true by double necessity, both by reference to the work of art, and to its creator. However, now we are interested not in the aesthetic object per se, but in the meaning which it expresses, that is, the expressed world of the aesthetic object. As we saw in 1.3.2.3., in order for the world of the aesthetic object to be true, it must be shown that it is not a world of fantasy, nor a private projection of emotions by the spectator. It must be shown not to merely be a more or less pleasurable emotional response to some external impression. Turning to the transcendental level, the question is whether or not the affective a priori is an a priori for the real world as well and not just the world of the aesthetic object, similar to the other a priori (such as presence and representation).

I have already, in chapter two, said it to be so by arguing that empathic experience is structured by the affective a priori. Dufrenne writes in a similar fashion, that we can, if we want, find confirmation of the reality of the aesthetic world by looking at the real world. The affective dimension of the real is to be found amongst "the innocent games of a child, the sparkling grace of a dancer or [in] the early spring, or the smiling face of a man who has quelled his passions through happiness and not through the law of conscience alone."[180] Moreover, he writes "in the presence of these examples I know that [the aesthetic object's] world is true, since the real confirms it."[181] But we don't even need to confirm the aesthetic world with the real, in order to appreciate its reality. Rather, according to Dufrenne, the world of the aesthetic object belongs to the object itself, but only when it is perceived as such by the spectator. This confirms that the significance of the aesthetic object is true. For aesthetic experience is therefore not to project private feelings unto the work of art, neither is it to passively receive an impression from it. It is a dual task of active participation in which the spectator and the work of art engages in order to discover the affective world of the aesthetic object. This world is true as it stems from the real, not the subject, and thus illuminates the real *for* the subject. But as we have said, while the world of science demonstrates the real, the world of the aesthetic object displays the real.

What we experience by the aesthetic object is, according to Dufrenne, the affective dimension of the real. However, it is not merely to experience it, as we saw in some depth in chapter two, that would be to merely live according to the affective. Aesthetic experience is

[180] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology,* 519.
[181] Ibid.

always also to *know that* we experience something true, and it is on this basis that we can truly see the implication of the conclusion in chapter two. Aesthetic experience lays claim to truth by contemplating and thus knowing the expressed world of the aesthetic object. This is why, in Dufrenne's terms, aesthetic experience of art is something important and serious. By contemplating the expressed world of the aesthetic object, we are contemplating a fundamental bond between man and world, which belongs to Being. At this point, we shall turn to Heidegger again and see how his understanding of truth and art relates to Dufrenne.

We have seen that Heidegger writes that the work of art *sets up* a world, while Dufrenne states that the aesthetic object *expresses* a world. Heidegger's 'setting up' means to "open up a world and [keeping] it abidingly in force."[182] Similar, we have seen that Dufrenne would agree that the expressed world of the aesthetic object belongs to the aesthetic object itself, and is not merely as a result of the subject's projection. A difference arises on the noetic level, nonetheless, by the fact that Dufrenne emphasizes the sensuous and experiential aspect of the aesthetic experience. Heidegger, on the other hand, is overtly hostile to such an understanding of the interaction between Dasein and the work of art, as he holds it to be too subjective.[183] Heidegger prefers the term *preservers* over spectator or perceiver, and I believe it is to avoid the subjective connotations of the two latter. This may arise out of the fact that Heidegger's description of the work of art is *principally* ontological, while Dufrenne's description of the aesthetic experience turns towards ontology *subsequently* when he discusses the meaning of aesthetic experience. Heidegger is critical to any theory that reduces the meaning of the work of art to sensuous entertainment, and maybe it is therefore he refuses to pay explicit attention to the sensuousness of the work of art? However, as we have seen, Dufrenne finds a potential in the pure sensuous presence of the aesthetic object, claiming that it is through the sensuous alone that the meaning of the aesthetic object is conveyed. In contrast, Heidegger gives precedence to truth as an outcome of the strife between the intelligible (world) and the unintelligible (earth).

I do not believe Dufrenne would agree on this last point, as it would give to much room for both imagination and determinant reflection, on behalf of feeling and indeterminate reflection. What is clear in any case, is that Dufrenne has a different emphasis, and that his understanding of the revelatory function of the aesthetic experience of art aims at a different aspect of reality than Heidegger. Still, Dufrenne mentions Heidegger's conception of earth

[182] Heidegger, "The Origin," 44.
[183] "Yet perhaps [aesthetic] experience [Ge. Erlebnis] is the element in which art dies. The dying occurs so slowly that it takes a few centuries." (Heidegger, "The Origin," 79).

while discussing the aesthetic object and nature, claiming that the irreducible sensuous presence of the aesthetic object is similar to the revelation of the earth.[184] For while Heidegger emphasizes the thingly aspect of the work of art, Dufrenne focuses on the sensuous presence of the aesthetic object, which in turn is there on the condition of being the work of art *as perceived*. Thus, we may say that both Dufrenne and Heidegger agree on the fact that the aesthetic object (or the work of art when preserved) has a material basis by which a meaning occurs. But in Heidegger's view, this is a strife between meaning and non-meaning, while Dufrenne conceives of the material basis as being immanent with meaning. Or rather, as we have seen, that the sensuous presence is itself meaningful. That is, that the signifier and signified coincides as a gesture. Heidegger understands the meaning that occurs to be truth of beings, while Dufrenne holds that it is the affective meaning of the real that occurs.

3.4. Conclusion

We have now seen that Dufrenne's conception of truth is almost identical with Heidegger's understanding of truth as alétheia, or uncovering. A major difference, nonetheless, is how they relate truth to art. Heidegger holds that art is truth setting itself to work. This means that in the work of art there is a struggle between the unintelligible and intelligible aspects of the work, which in the meeting with its preserver (or spectator) makes truth of beings unfold. For Dufrenne truth is the discovering of a meaning that enables the subject to grasp the real, in other words, truth happens by the illumination of the real. The world of the aesthetic object is such an illumination of the real, and the aesthetic experience is to experience *and* to contemplate this meaning. According to Dufrenne this is the aspect of the aesthetic experience of art that makes art serious and important. The aesthetic experience of art allows the spectator to contemplate a fundamental part of his constitution as an existing human being in contact with his world, which on the transcendental level, Dufrenne terms as the affective a priori. We have now come to see what the value of the aesthetic experience of art is for Dufrenne, namely truth. Art is important because it is true.

But if art is true, how does it relate to its socio-cultural context? Can the appreciation of art be explained through the social and cultural background of the perceiver? In the next chapter we will return to Hal Foster's "Post-Critical" and Paul Crowther's term *reductionism*, which was introduced in the introduction.

[184] "It is an imperious presence, because the materiality of the object is heightened by it and because the sensuous finds its apotheosis in it…This is why, in Heidegger's view, the work of art brings forth a world and at the same time reveals the earth." Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology*, 89.

Four | Aesthetics and Reductionism

4.0. Introduction

As we now have seen and discussed some major features of Dufrenne's theory of aesthetic experience, we are ready to return to the opening section of this thesis. We saw that Hal Foster, in his article "Post-Critical," is highly dismissive to, amongst others, artistic practices that aim "to promote phenomenological experience,"[185] but which, in his view, end up offering ""experience" returned as "atmosphere" and/or "affect," produced as effects yet seem intimate, indeed internal, nonetheless."[186] According to Foster, these practices should be subjected to anti-fetishistic critique, a term I will return to shortly. Introductory, we briefly saw that Paul Crowther terms a tendency in contemporary art theory as *reductionism*. I will argue that Foster's article is an example of this tendency. We will now turn to this term, in order to subsequently argue that Dufrenne offers a possible alternative to the reductionist approaches. Contrary to a strict divide between the a priori structure of aesthetic experience and its socio-cultural context, I will propose that we should understand the aesthetic experience as an absolute structure occurring within a relative socio-cultural context.

4.1. Reductionism

Briefly put, Crowther separates between *social* and *semiotic* reductionism, without claiming that these are the only forms of reductionism.[187] In contemporary art theory social reductionism is any approach that tends "to reduce all questions of meaning to issues of socio-historical contexts of production and reception."[188] Moreover, semiotic reductionism is "a tendency to assimilate art's visual dimension on the basis of models derived from literary analysis."[189] Crowther's critique is not aimed at the different socio-historical, or semiotic methods of art history per se, but to the tendency to view these approaches as *sufficient* explanatory models of the way in which art is meaningful. According to Crowther, the result of the reductionist tendency is that many contemporary art theorists tend to reduce artistic creation into production, or construction, of meaning.[190] And this in turn has some striking political consequences. For reducing artistic creation into *production* of meaning, implies that

[185] Foster, "Post-Critical," 7.
[186] Ibid.
[187] We can think of biological or psychological reductionism as well. I will focus on social reductionism.
[188] Crowther, *Phenomenology of the Visual Arts (even the frame),* 12.
[189] Ibid.
[190] Amongst others, Griselda Pollock, Rosalind Krauss, W.T.J. Mitchell, Norman Bryson and Jonathan Crary.

the spectator of art is turned into a consumer, and that the singularity of the art work is reduced to a commodity, a site for art consumption. I quote in some length,

> The strategies of reductionist art history and theory (and related feminist, postcolonial, and poststructuralistic critique) interpret the visual image as a means to an end or, better, as a text meaningful only in terms of its informational or persuasive functions in the site of class, race, and gender struggles. This involves an almost exclusively concern with the image's relation to modes of consumption. Its *aesthetically formed* basis … is reduced to a mode of signification which counts as just one element amongst others in the 'construction' of meaning. In effect, this approach allows the western art management structure – historians, critics, curators, and administrators – to redefine art on the basis of their own professional interpretative interest. This approach is an unconscious expression of the consumerist mind-set of neo-conservatism – a mind-set which characterizes all things fundamentally in terms of their use-value.[191]

In other words, reductionism is, according to Crowther, a symptom of a contemporary, western ideological current, which in turn fails to address what is the most important aspect of art, namely its intrinsic, aesthetic significance.[192] Even though a sociological analysis may find that judgments of taste reflects issues of class, race and gender, to reduce the judgment of taste to a question concerning these issues *alone,* is to fail to address the question of what it is about the particular art work that makes it available for entering such a discourse in the first place. How can art lend itself to the importance granted it in the socio-historical analysis? We will return to this point further down, but before doing so, we will turn to Hal Foster's antifetishistic critique as an example of the reductionist tendency.

4.2. Hal Foster's Antifetishism

As we have seen, Foster holds that the product of artistic practices that seek "to promote phenomenological experience"[193] should be put under antifetishistic critique. But what is phenomenological experience, and what is antifetishism? For Foster, phenomenological experience seems to be the "reflexivity of "seeing oneself see,"[194] or what we in my view, and more appropriately (as phenomenology tries to overcome the body/spirit dualism), may call attentiveness to seeing, or rather, aesthetic experience. Foster writes that those artists who aim at such experience, nevertheless ends up *producing effects* available for "our appreciative

[191] Crowther, *Phenomenology of the Visual Arts (even the frame)*, 14-15.
[192] We shall return to Crowther's theory of the intrinsic significance of the image further down.
[193] Foster, "Post-Critical," 7.
[194] Ibid.

amazement."[195] Antifetishism is then the practice of revealing the site of production for the meaning we grant to the work of art. He writes,

> My critique of fetishization is not a suspicion of desire, pleasure and so on; it is simply a resistance, more Blakean than Marxist, to any operation whereby human creation (e.g., God, the Internet) is projected above us with an agency of its own, from which position it is as likely to subjugate us as it is to serve us.[196]

In other words, to put aesthetic experience under antifetishistic critique implies that any "power," or intrinsic value the art work may seem to have, is indeed *projected* unto the work. Implicitly, by the spectator, public, institution and finally society and history.[197] This act of projection is what Foster's antifetishism seeks to reveal. However, this shows in my view two weaknesses with Foster's argumentation. Fist, he gives primacy to instrumental reason, and therefore fails to acknowledge the importance of other forms of non-conceptual meaning involved in art, such as aesthetic experience. This is so, insofar as he *must* presuppose the possibility of showing that aesthetic, or "phenomenological," experience indeed may be explicable or paraphrasable in rational terms, and thus subordinate to instrumental reason, *if* he wants to put it under antifetishistic critique. Secondly, in line with the reductionist tendencies mentioned above, Foster reduces artistic creation to meaning production, which subsumes the experience of art to art consumption.

Regarding the first point, we may answer by reference to Dufrenne, that the "agency," or "affect" of the aesthetic object is not projected unto the work by the spectator. Rather, according to Dufrenne, the expressed world of the aesthetic object is a true world. It bears on the real itself, and cannot be reduced to the subjectivity of the spectator. However, as we have seen, the spectator is also necessary for the world of the aesthetic object to spring forth. Moreover, we have indeed seen that the term quasi-subject is designated to describe the aesthetic object with a kind of agency. But this is so only insofar as it works as a proxy for its creator. Thus, what guarantees the aesthetic object as a quasi-subject is not the spectator alone, but also its being as a created object. By giving primacy to instrumental reason, it is impossible for Foster to acknowledge the importance of aspects of human experience that may not be explicable rationally. In my view, this is what is implied when he introduces the section quoted above with the apology that his critique is "not a suspicion of desire, pleasure

[195] Foster, "Post-Critical," 7.
[196] Ibid.
[197] This is in line with Marx' analysis of commodity fetishism in Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2011), 81-96. See especially 83.

and so on."[198] What does he mean by "so on"? We can't know. But it is apparent that he is suspicious of aesthetic experience.

Regarding the second point, by giving primacy to instrumental reason and the reduction of artistic creation to meaning production ("sensations that are *produced* as effects" and "thoughts and feelings, *processes* them as images and effects"[199]), Foster reduces the experience of art into art consumption. The art work is then understood as a thing with a use-value which may be put to work in this or that project – in Foster's case, towards political awareness. The problem with this view is twofold. First, if the work of art is reduced to its function in a context – let us say a political context – we face a problem posed by Theodor Adorno concerning commitment in art. He holds that every artistic portrayal of suffering includes, however little, an implicit enjoyment of the suffering, which is ethically problematic.[200] And as Jacques Rancière puts it, "the exploited rarely require an explanation of the laws of exploitation."[201] Dufrenne does not comment on the relation between art and politics in *The Phenomenology* since his task is to describe the aesthetic experience of art. However, he states that anything which draws the spectator's attention *away* from the aesthetic object is harmful for the work of art *as* aesthetic object. This does not entail that the *work of art* cannot be political or committed, only that the *aesthetic object* cannot be so. Second, *if* we accept that the work of art may function political, we still need to find out what it is about the work of art that enables such a meaning to come forth by entirely artistic means. How does the work of art lend itself to the discourse of politics? In order to understand that, we must first acknowledge and presuppose *that* works of art has irreducible ways of conveying meaning, and secondly, address this kind of meaning.

Interestingly, we may note that the same critique as we raised towards Foster, has been put forward towards theories of aesthetic experience. A recent example is the art theorist Boris Groys, who writes that

> in order to experience aesthetic enjoyment of any kind, the spectator must be aesthetically educated, and this education necessarily reflects the social and cultural milieus into which the spectator was born and in which he or she lives. In other words,

[198] Foster, "Post-Critical," 7.
[199] Ibid. My italics.
[200] Theodor Adorno, "Commitment," in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, *Art in Theory: 1900-2000*, 779-783, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 780.
[201] Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), 46-47.

> *the aesthetic attitude presupposes the subordination of art production to art consumption* – and thus the subordination of art theory to sociology.[202]

Again, I hold this to be a reductionist view on art, but the change here is that now the *aesthetic experience* is reduced to art consumption.[203] This, I believe, calls for some comments. First of all, the error of Groys is in my view that he deduces from the fact that aesthetic enjoyment reflects social and cultural milieus, to the conclusion that aesthetic enjoyment can be *reduced* to the social and cultural circumstances of its occurrence. This is what is implied by his statement that the aesthetic attitude *subordinates* art theory to sociology, and what leads him further in the article to subordinate aesthetics to poetics. Secondly, Groys seems, like Foster, to fail to acknowledge that the aesthetic experience of art may not, if we follow Dufrenne's theory, be reduced to consumption. The premise of such an conclusion must be that the value of the aesthetic object, like any commodity, lies in its consumption (as Marx put it, "by its properties [satisfy] human wants"[204]). The correlate to consumption in this context then, is aesthetic perception. But we have seen that the value of the aesthetic object cannot be reduced to perception, as its expressed world is a true world. Aesthetic perception is thus never entirely satisfied by the "properties" of the aesthetic object, because the expressed world is inexhaustible. To view art as meaning production on the other hand, may imply that the experience of art can be reduced to consumption. The meaning of the work may be reduced to the socio-historical context of its production and reception alone, only if we are ignorant to its intrinsic significance. Foster's claim that anti-fetishism should be applied to the "product" of artists who aim to promote "phenomenological experience," is in my view a testimony of such ignorance.

4.3. The affective a priori and its socio-cultural context

We have now been quite critical to the reductionist tendency, exemplified by Foster and Groys. This critique must nevertheless not be confused with a complete rejection of the socio-cultural context of the aesthetic experience. As we have seen, the aesthetic experience is, according to Dufrenne, both necessary and universal, but only so for the "concrete subject

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[202] Boris Groys, *Going Public*, (New York: Sternberg, 2010), 11. My italics. Boris Groys (1947-) is Global Distinguished Professor of Russian and Slavic Studies at New York University and Senior Research Fellow at the Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design.

[203] Groys is here highly reminiscent of Bourdieu who wrote, "The gaze is a product of history reproduced by education." Pierre Bourdieu, ""Innledning" Til Distinksjonen (1979)," in *Estetisk Teori: En Antologi*, Kjersti Bale and Arnfinn Bø-Rygg (Ed.), 378-395, (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2008), 380. My translation.

[204] Marx, *Capital*, 41.

capable of sustaining a vital relationship with a world."[205] How do the subjective experience and its socio-cultural context intersect?

The framework we gave in the introduction gives us the answer. We saw (1.4.2.) that Merleau-Ponty transformed Husserl's theory of the phenomenological reduction by claiming the impossibility of the complete reduction (to which Dufrenne concurs). The subject is always in a world, and the world is, as we have seen, the formation of a significant whole dependent on both the subject and the real itself. For as Merleau-Ponty puts it, "phenomenology's most important accomplishment is, it would seem, to have joined an extreme subjectivism with an extreme objectivism through its concept of the world."[206] The world is this intersection between consciousness and the real. As we have seen, Dufrenne proposes various a priori that, logically, must govern this relation. On the level of physical presence, we have briefly noted the a priori of presence. At the level of representation, there is the a priori of representation.[207] Concerning the level of affectivity, there is the affective a priori. This a priori is a logical structure between man and the real which governs the affective dimension of the world. This may occur, as we saw in chapter two, between different subjects as in empathy, or in relation to an aesthetic object. As we saw in chapter three, to equate the affective a priori of the perceived work of art with the affective a priori of the real world is to hold that the expression of the aesthetic object is *true*. Which is to say that the affective dimension of the world *does not belong solely to the experiencing subject, but also to the real itself.* There is something *in the world*, and there is something *in the aesthetic object*, that we may experience as sadness or joy, but it is only as such for the living and breathing human being.[208] As Dufrenne puts it, the a priori only occurs through the a posteriori.

Socio-cultural context is therefore always already present in any aesthetic experience, and as Groys rightfully notes above, any aesthetic enjoyment involves some sort of aesthetic education. However, if the expressed world of the aesthetic object is true, we cannot *reduce* our experience of it to our education. Neither art theory nor aesthetics can thus be subordinate to a sociology of art, for this sociology must presuppose the being of aesthetic experience in the first place. The expression of the work of art cannot be subject to antifetishistic critique

[205] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology*, 437.
[206] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, lxxxiv.
[207] See 3.2. We could continue by the level of sensuousness, which would be somewhat similar to what Merleau-Ponty in his latest writings called *flesh*. See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*. John Wild (Ed.), (Evanston: Northwestern University Press,1968). And Dufrenne's text on Merleau-Ponty's "Eye and Mind" Mikel Dufrenne, "Eye and Mind," in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting.* Galen A. Johnson, (Ed.), 256-262, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993).
[208] Again, we must emphasize that we do not speak of a mere emotion, but an affective quality which may structure a world.

either, if the expression is true. I propose that we may understand the aesthetic experience of Dufrenne in the terms "relative-absolute" or "flexible-absolute," in so far as the aesthetic experience is an absolute structure in a relative or flexible socio-cultural context.[209] In other words, the particular aesthetic meaning conveyed in the aesthetic experience will be different in each socio-cultural context, but the structure of the experience, as necessary and universal, is *essential* to any aesthetic experience.

4.4. Conclusion

We have now briefly discussed Hal Foster's "Post-Critical" and argued that it is an example of what Paul Crowther calls reductionism. Contrary to this reductionist tendency, I have argued that Dufrenne's theory provides a balance between the fundamental structure of aesthetic experience and its socio-cultural context. But does not our argumentation have a silent premise, namely that art always is available for aesthetic perception? Is this not equally reductionist, as all meaning of the work of art is reduced into its affective expression? Of course, we know that much contemporary art does not lend itself to the aesthetic perception in Dufrenne's sense. Or at least, art does not always *promote* such perception. And even though we have emphasized that *The Phenomenology* is a description of the *aesthetic* experience of the work of art, and not a description of the experience of art as such, Dufrenne states that the work of art "has its *telos* in the aesthetic object."[210] Thus, the aesthetic dimension of the work of art is a privileged one, and for Dufrenne, this dimension is first and foremost the expressive world of the aesthetic object. In other words, Dufrenne's theory is on the verge of being reductionist in its own sense. Nevertheless, as we shall discuss in the next chapter, there are other theories than Dufrenne's which addresses the many ways in which art means more than what is available to instrumental reason. To repeat, I read Dufrenne's theory not to be an exhaustive theory of our experience of art as such, but an exemplary theory of the *aesthetic* experience of art limited to concern affective expression. The expression of an affective world is in my view, *one* of the ways in which art may convey meaning in a strictly aesthetics sense. In the last chapter I will compare and contrast Dufrenne's theory with three recent theories on the sensuous significance of art.

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[209] The term "relative-absolute" is taken from Sartre's definition of the perceived phenomenon in Sartre, *Being and Nothingness,* 2. According to Sartre the phenomenon is relative to the consciousness who perceives it, but not a product of that consciousness and therefore absolute. Dufrenne criticizes Sartre for merely putting the notion into a formula, rather than addressing the problem of perception as such. Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology,* 219. Nevertheless, for the present matter the formula serves to point at the relationship between the a priori structure of the aesthetic experience and its socio-cultural context.

[210] Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology*, 17.

Five | Aesthetic Significances

5.0. Introduction

We have seen in the previous chapters that according to Dufrenne, the aesthetic experience is the reading of, and contemplation on, the sensuous expression of the aesthetic object. In Dufrenne's theory a main point is that the affective dimension of the aesthetic object is a true aspect of its being, rather than emotions projected into the work by the spectator. In the previous chapter I argued that even though the aesthetic perception of the work of art is always situated in a concrete, socio-cultural context, we cannot reduce the experience to be a result of its context alone. To the contrary, I argued that we might understand the aesthetic experience through the formula of the relative-absolute. However, the previous chapter ended by opening up for other forms of aesthetic meaning than affective expression. In this final chapter I will present three recent approaches to the significance of aesthetic experience, and briefly discuss their merits in light of Dufrenne's theory.

5.1. Mitchell Green's "Empathy, Expression and what Artworks Have to Teach"

Mitchell Green's article from 2008 goes straight to the heart of the discussion we presented in chapter two of this thesis, regarding the relationship between aesthetics and empathy. In the article Green argues that one of the most important dimension of what artworks *do* is their ability to convey phenomenal and/or affective knowledge.[211] He defines the former as "knowledge of how some object or state of affairs looks, sounds, smells, etc."[212], and the latter as "knowledge of how an emotion of mood feels."[213] As the latter is the most relevant for this thesis, I will focus on affective knowledge. Briefly put, Green holds that one of the ways artworks may convey meaning is through the mode of *showing* which he calls *showing how*. This is contrasted to *showing that*, which conveys propositional knowledge, and the form of showing that conveys perceptual knowledge. According to Green, artworks may show how an emotion or mood appears and feels, by portraying this emotion. Furthermore showing how may provide knowledge of the similar mode, *knowing how*. In other words, if the work of art shows how an emotion appears, the appropriate spectator may be able to *know how* that emotion appears. Similar, a work of art may show how an emotion *feels*, and provide

[211] Green mentions propositional and perceptual knowledge as other forms of knowledge that may be conveyed by the work of art.
[212] Green, "Empathy, Expression and what Artworks Have to Teach," 95.
[213] Ibid.

knowledge of how that emotion feels to the spectator. This latter point is according to Green dependent of empathy. According to Green 'many writers' holds that for empathy to take place it is a sufficient condition that A feels the X of B, if X is the emotion of B. However, Green argues, it is a mistake to think that one must duplicate the feeling of the other in order to empathize. Rather, according to Green, A may empathize with B's expressed emotion X, if A can use the B's X as a *prop for imagining* how it is like for B to experience X. Concerning the work of art, if we have a painting of an angry face, we may use it first, to learn how anger appears, and second, to learn how anger feels by using it as a prop for our imagination. Therefore, artworks may teach us how emotions and moods appear and feel, and hence train our empathic capacities.

Green's account of empathy is a perfect example of what we saw Max Scheler called the argument from analogy (2.1). One of the many problems with this view is, according to Scheler, that if we shall be able to use the expression X as a prop for our imagination, we must be able to experience the expression X as expressive in the first place. In other words, we must experience the angry face as expressive *in order to* use it as a prop for our imagination, and thus Green's account presupposes empathy rather than proving it. Despite several weaknesses in his theory,[214] Green points at an important question that we faced already in chapter two. For if Dufrenne's notion of feeling is identified with empathy, does this entail that only empathic people may have aesthetic experiences? Green's account of the relation between empathy and aesthetic experience may seem to point in this direction, even though he does not say so explicitly. I believe we should be careful to conclude in such a way. Rather, I think we may separate between empathy and feeling by pointing at the qualitative difference between the living being and the aesthetic object (see 2.3.1.). Even though the aesthetic object may be an aesthetic perception of a living being, feeling is to be attentive to the expressivity of the *sensuous appearance* of the living being as such, and not the living being qua living being. Feeling and empathy must in other words remain separate (even though we identified them for the sake of analysis in chapter two), as the ability to read the expression of the other is qualitatively different from the reading of the expressivity of the sensuous appearance as such. Empathy is, as we have seen, to read and respond appropriately to the expressive behavior of the living being. On the other hand, the aesthetic experience of

[214] For instance he holds that because yellow is experienced as a happy color (which, according to Green, is proved by experimental psychology), a yellow painting may teach us how happiness appears and feels. The argument is circular, and therefore not logically valid. See Green, "Empathy, Expression," 110, on the congruence of sensation and affect, and Green "Empathy, Expression," 115-116, for the conclusion drawn from the congruence.

works of art teaches us to be attentive to the expressivity of sensuous appearances. That is, it teaches us that pure sensuous appearances may convey affective meaning. The next work we shall turn to now is Martin Seel's *Aesthetics of Appearing*, in which he formulates a theory on this ability to be attentive to sensuous appearances.

5.2. Martin Seel's *Aesthetics of Appearing*[215]

The basic theory of Seel is identical to Dufrenne's theory. Similar to Dufrenne, he separates between the aesthetic object and the aesthetic perception. These are different aspects of the same complex, which he names the aesthetic situation (Dufrenne would say aesthetic experience). Furthermore, Seel separates between the sensuous being-so and the aesthetic appearing of the object. This is similar to Dufrenne's separation between the work of art and the aesthetic object. However, they differ on the level of sensuous appearances, and the meaning of the aesthetic situation/experience. And while Dufrenne takes the aesthetic experience of the work of art as his starting point, Seel begins with ordinary objects. Basically, aesthetic perception is for Seel to be attentive to a play of appearances. But he distinguishes three levels of appearances which all are possible objects of the aesthetic perception. These are *mere*, *atmospheric* and *artistic* appearing, which are distinguished "depending on how we allow [the aesthetic object] to affect us."[216] The first level is the mere attentiveness to the simultaneous sensuous givenness as such. In this, we contemplate the internal play of the appearance itself, and the quality of that play.

Atmospheric appearing, on the other hand, is an intuition of the atmosphere of the aesthetic situation. In this, the appearing gains existential significance to the perceiver as a starting point for imagination and reflection on his own relationship to the aesthetic situation.

Finally, artistic appearing concerns the level in which the perceiver uses the given appearance as a guide for the imagination on, and the interpretation of, the work of art. However, the interpretative meaning of the appearance is inseparable from the sensuous rendering of the materiality of the aesthetic object as such. Contrary to the other two levels, artistic appearing bespeaks the aesthetic object's cultural significance as being a *presentation* of a certain worked material.

[215]This brief survey is based on Martin Seel, "The Aesthetics of Appearing," and the second chapter of *Aesthetics of Appearing*, in which Seel presents his theory in length. The first chapter is a rough history of aesthetics, the remaining chapters are discussions based on the insights of chapter two.
[216] Seel, *Aesthetics of Appearing*, 117.

Even though each level has their own distinct qualities, they all share the same *basic* meaning according to Seel. All attentiveness to the play of appearances, either as such or on the level of the atmospheric or artistic, is *intuitions of the present*. Thus, the aesthetic situation is a form of intensely experience of the fact that the perceiver is present in the world, and in relation to such and such an (aesthetic) object. But contrary to mere appearing, both atmospheric and artistic appearing includes the perceiver's past and future, socio-cultural context and imagination. While artistic appearing alone includes interpretation of the appearance.

Seel's level of mere appearing closely resembles Dufrenne's description of the aesthetic experience. However, it is somewhat unclear which significance Seel gives the affective dimension of this experience, which we have seen is central to Dufrenne. On the one hand, he writes that the mere concentration on sensory appearing may indeed be experienced as "absolutely beautiful,"[217] but on the other hand, that it in no way goes "beyond the present; it does not pass into the exemplary or the general; it neither seeks nor finds meaning; it stays at a bodily perception of the sensuous presence of its objects."[218] If mere appearing may convey beauty, but does not pass into the general (which we have seen for Dufrenne is the relation between the affective quality and the affective category, see 1.3.1.), it seems to me that the experience of beauty, according to Seel, is reduced either to a private emotional reaction, or an affective projection unto the aesthetic object. However, he claims otherwise, that contrary to being projections, each level of encounter "generates different access to the *reality* of its objects."[219] The question then is how beauty can be a reality of the aesthetic object. But what this reality is, and whether or not beauty is an aspect of it, is not a theme for Seel. Rather, as we have seen, the meaning of the aesthetic situation is for Seel a heightened sense of the present, which is crucial for human existence.[220]

Where Seel goes beyond Dufrenne's theory is on the notions of atmospheric and artistic appearing. Dufrenne has no corresponding concepts, even though he emphasizes that the expressed world of the aesthetic object is less a world than an *atmosphere* of a world. Nevertheless, I believe Dufrenne would reject both of these forms of appearing as not being

[217] Seel, "The Aesthetics of Appearing," 22.
[218] Seel, *Aesthetics of Appearing*, 92.
[219] Ibid., 118.
[220] Dufrenne would nevertheless disagree that attentiveness, strictly speaking, is the intuition of the present. Rather, he writes that attentiveness is to take refuge in the past in order to perceive the future through a representation (see 1.2.1.). According to Dufrenne, presence is always already headed towards the future, immersed in action.

strictly aesthetic as they engage to much of imagination and determinant reflection, through interpretation. However, in my view Seel points at aspects of sensuous perception that, even though they to a large extent actively engage imagination and interpretation, cannot be reduced to the act of imagination and interpretation. They can neither be equated with the reading of the expressed world of the aesthetic object, in Dufrenne's sense, and therefore I agree with Seel that they should be considered separate forms of aesthetic experience. But Seel's theory does not provide answers to how an aesthetic object may appear atmospheric, or how this atmosphere may be, as he writes, a *reality* of the object. What exactly the relation between the perceiver, the aesthetic object and the atmosphere that saturates the situation is, is left unanswered.[221]

Seel's notion of artistic appearing I believe is a good conception, as he holds that the meaning of *every* work of art is tied to the specific manner of its appearing. In this respect, Dufrenne's theory seems quite limited, as he would only count the affective aspect of aesthetic appearing as an authentic aesthetic experience. However, I think we may both hold that art have the capacity to express an affective world in Dufrenne's sense, and still address the relation between subject and object in yet other ways through its appearance. Seel provides several examples of artistic appearing by many works of art, but he does not provide a general theory of *how* and in what manner artistic appearing may convey sensuous meaning. Such a general theory is however the aim of Paul Crowther, to whom we shall turn next.

5.3. Paul Crowther's *The Phenomenology of the Visual Arts (even the frame)*

As we have seen, both in the introduction and in chapter four, Crowther's starting point is a critique of reductionist tendencies of contemporary art theory and history. With the aim of supplementing, rather than substituting, the reductionist approaches, he offers a general theory of the intrinsic significance of the *image* (understood as encompassing all the visual arts), and thus not a general theory of aesthetic experience. Briefly, his main point is that all visual art addresses what he calls *phenomenological depth*, which centers on the *ontological reciprocity* between subject and object. In my view, this is what we in Dufrenne's terms may call the various a priori structures of the relation between subject and world. Trough the work of art, the spectator may intuitively engage in the various aspects of phenomenological depth, which

[221] I'm aware of Gornot Böhme's work on this field, but it is beyond the scope of this thesis to go into this. See Gernot Böhme, ""Innføring" fra *Aisthetik.Vorlesungen über Ästhetik als allgemeine Wahrnehmungslehre* (2001)," in *Estetisk Teori: En Antologi*. Kjersti Bale and Arnfinn Bø-Rygg, (Ed.), 519-532, (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2008). Gernot Böhme, *Atmosphäre: Essay zur neuen Âsthetik*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995).

when done for the sake of this engagement as such, is aesthetic experience. Crowther describes the various ways the visual arts addresses different aspects of phenomenological depth, from painting and sculpture, through digital and conceptual art to architecture. Roughly, the painting has different structural aspects, which Crowther conceives of through descriptions of figure, plane and frame. The painting can through these structures present an alternative visual reality that, even though it may refer to some external referent, must not by necessity do so. In this sense, the painting is not necessarily a representation but always a *presentation.* It may address the perceptual, imaginative or interpretative aspects of phenomenological depth, by allowing the spectator to suspend his natural attitude towards the world. We may add with Dufrenne, the affective aspect of phenomenological depth, even though Crowther would disagree on this point as he relates affectivity to imaginative projection.[222]

5.4. Conclusion

Even though a broader discussion of Crowther's theory would be interesting, I will not go into the theory in further detail at this point. For the gain of Crowther's work is in my view not the theory he presents but the conclusion he offers. He argues that the notion of phenomenological depth addresses the *raison d'être* of art, which is common to any artistic practice and appreciation, in any culture regardless of whether the aesthetic object is called art or not. He goes into the question of how it may be that (visual) art has been, and is, a serious and important aspect of human culture throughout the ages. And he answers that it is because the arts addresses the key factors of human existence, which in Crowther terms is conceived of as *phenomenological depth*, but which in Dufrenne's terms are the various a priori. Even though Crowther does not explicitly say so, a necessary conclusion of his argument is that when the factors of phenomenological depth is not isolated to the experience of art, but is also factors of the relation between subject and world in ordinary life as well, the intuition of phenomenological depth is *true*, in Dufrenne's sense. This is so insofar as the intuition of phenomenological depth must bear upon the real itself, if Crowther's conception of ontological reciprocity shall make sense. In other words, the intuition of the various factors of phenomenological depth illuminates the real. In this sense, we may use Crowther's work to expand Dufrenne's notion of the aesthetic object to encompass not only the affective, but also other a priori structures of the relation between subject and world. This would give a theory

[222] Crowther, *The Phenomenology of the Visual Arts,* 108-109.

which could manage to be relevant to a broader aspect of artistic practices than Dufrenne's theory does, as his is restricted to those works of art that, as we stated introductory, is held to *promote* aesthetic experience – or as we can now add, to promote *affective* aesthetic experience. In my view, a theory on aesthetic experience must both be able to conceive of the serious nature of the affective dimension of appearing, but also the many other ways works of art may address the ontological reciprocity, or a priori structures, between the subject and his world.

Furthermore, Crowther holds that art historical and theoretical research may benefit from the notion of phenomenological depth, as it addresses what it is about the work of art that may be experienced in it, and in it alone. However, following the argument from the previous chapter, even though aesthetic experience is irreducible to the socio-cultural context of its occurrence, it cannot be fully understood without it. Crowther argues that an interdisciplinary approach between philosophy and art history may reduce the risk of any form of reductionism. As we have seen in this thesis some work has already been done in this field, but there is yet more to do.

Conclusion | Art, Empathy, Truth

In this thesis I have argued, in line with Mikel Dufrenne's theory of aesthetic experience from *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience* from 1953, that the aesthetic experience is an irreducible aspect of human existence, which is valuable in its own right, because it is true.

In chapter one I presented Dufrenne's theory in some length, focusing on the phenomenological parts, while also including the transcendental analytic. Briefly, Dufrenne holds that the aesthetic experience is structured by an affective a priori, which is an a priori not only for the expressed world of the aesthetic object, but also the real world. The expressed world of the aesthetic object is therefore true. This thesis has discussed three questions to this view. First, if the aesthetic experience is a bodily comprehension of sensuous expression, what separates it from empathy? Second, if it is said that the expressed meaning of the aesthetic object is true, what is aesthetic truth? Third, if it is held that aesthetic experience is fundamental, and thus necessary and universal, how does it relate to its socio-cultural context?

In chapter two I argued that the main difference between aesthetic and empathic experience is that the former lays claim to truth. We may say, somewhat similar to Seel, that while empathic experience is affective, aesthetic experience is, according to Dufrenne, an *intuition* of a singular affective quality.

In chapter three, I presented and discussed Dufrenne's and Heidegger's understandings of the concept of truth, and how they relate it to art. Heidegger holds that truth happens in the work of art as a strife between the intelligible and unintelligible aspects of the work. Dufrenne, on the other hand, hold that the work of art may be true, insofar as the aesthetic object illuminates the real, which therefore reveals an aspect of Being.

In chapter four, I discussed Paul Crowther's concept of social reductionism, and argued that Hal Foster's claim that aesthetic expression should be subject to antifetishistic critique is an example of this tendency. Furthermore, I argued that even though the aesthetic experience is necessary and universal, it always occurs within and is shaped by a socio-cultural context. My objection aimed in other words at the *reductionist* tendency, not the study of socio-cultural context of art as such. Rather, I proposed that we should understand aesthetic experience as an absolute structure occurring within a relative context.

In the fifth and final chapter, I presented three contemporary approaches to aesthetic meaning by Green, Seel and Crowther, and briefly discussed their merits in light of Dufrenne's theory. The conclusion was that I hold Dufrenne's theory to provide important

insight into the *affective* aspect of aesthetic experience, while I hold that this is not the *only* aspect of aesthetic experience. Both Seel and Crowther gives interesting insights in other ways works of art may convey aesthetic significance, but I do not think that either provides the comprehensiveness and thoroughness as Dufrenne's work do.

I hope that this thesis will provoke interest in Dufrenne's work, as I think his work deserves far more attention than it has until now. Further research might address the various elements in the work of art that forms the structural basis for the expressed world of the aesthetic object. This might be addressed both in particular works of art, the style of an artist or an entire epoch. For *how* does art mean and what is this meaning? Dufrenne's proposal concerns the affective meaning of art, but as we have seen, both Seel and Crowther proposes other ways art may convey aesthetic meaning through the notions of artistic appearing and phenomenological depth. In my view this calls for an interdisciplinary approach to art history and philosophical aesthetics which both acknowledges the intrinsic significance of the aesthetic object, *and* the various interpretative horizons of the work of art, such as the socio-cultural context of its creation and appreciation. For in stating that the aesthetic experience is an absolute structure in a relative context is indeed to put the difficult question into a formula, not to resolve the problem. Further research might give more nuanced answers to how aesthetic meaning and the socio-cultural context of its occurrence intersect, without giving primacy of the one over the other. I think an approach to art history which takes into account perspectives from the phenomenological tradition, might provide interesting insights that may help us to further our understanding of why and how art means so much to so many.

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